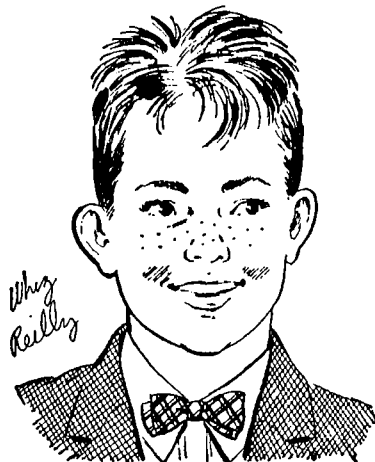
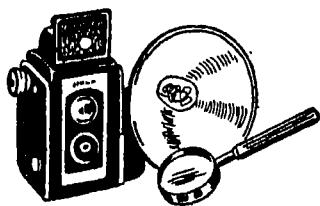
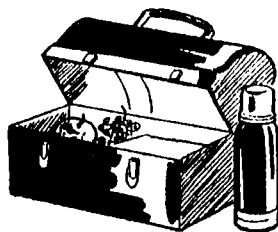


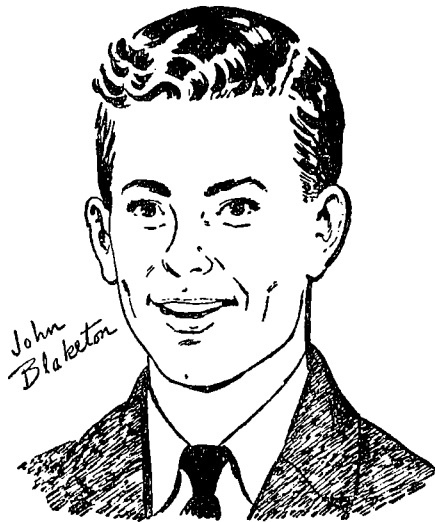
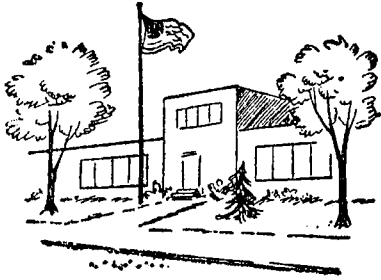
GINNY GORDON

and the

BROADCAST MYSTERY



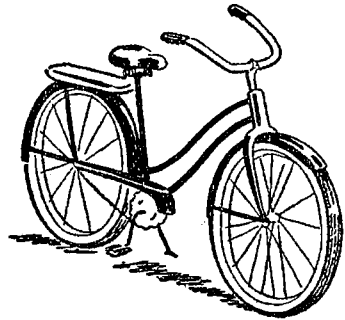




*John
Blaketon*



*Emmy
Gordon*





Ginny Gordon

and

THE BROADCAST MYSTERY

By
JULIE CAMPBELL

Illustrated by
MARGARET WESLEY

WHITMAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
RACINE, WISCONSIN

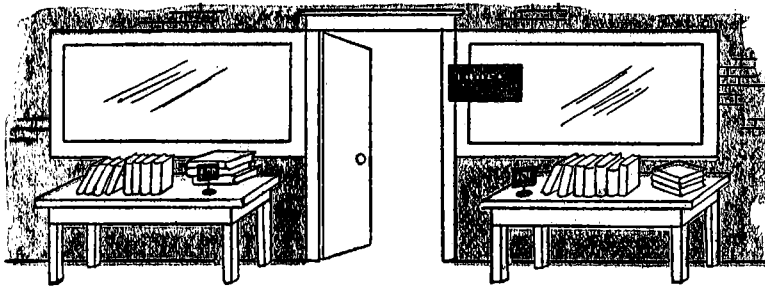
© Copyright, 1956, by
WHITMAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PRINTED IN U.S.A.

All names, characters, and events in this
story are entirely fictitious.

CONTENTS

1. Secondhand Troubles	9
2. Rhyme? and Reason?	27
3. Bad Business	41
4. Ginny Gordon—Star!	55
5. "More Than You Can Chew"	71
6. Mrs. Arnold Is Angry	80
7. A New Friend	96
8. Lady Incognito	111
9. Emergency Meeting!	122
10. Facing Facts	136
11. Humble Pie	149
12. The Sun Comes Out	157
13. Scraps and a Mystery	169
14. A Jinx at Work	182
15. Worry—Either Way	195
16. Up in the Air!	203
17. The Last Straw	217
18. The Missing Telegram	224
19. Alicia Confesses	236
20. "What I Owe You"	247
21. "Thanks Five Hundred!"	265





1 • SECONDHAND TROUBLES

“Thank goodness you’re back, John!” Ginny clutched her chestnut curls. “How can we ever create order out of this chaos?” Ginny, a slim girl of fourteen, was literally surrounded on all sides by stacks of secondhand books. Only her pretty face showed above them as she greeted John Blaketon who had just come into the Book Stall.

Fifteen-year-old John smiled his slow teasing smile and said, “Chaos is right! But at least *you’re* hemmed in so you can’t make a bad situation worse!”

“Oh, is that so?” Ginny demanded. “Since when did I ever make a bad situation worse?”

John calmly smoothed his black, wavy hair back from his wide forehead. “Lots of times. Every time we Hustlers launch a money-making project you get us involved in a mystery which creates all kinds of chaos! Have you forgot-

ten about your Great-Aunt Betsy's candlesticks and Mrs. Arnold's missing heirloom and the adventure we had in the old barn and—"

"Oh, stop it!" Ginny grabbed a tattered paperback volume from the top of one pile and tossed it at him. "That for you, John Blaketon! Every time anything goes wrong you blame me, but I'll have you know that I'm *not* to blame for this mess." Pointing to a stack of beautifully bound old volumes she added: "Mrs. Arnold donated these and I think some of them may be quite valuable although the print is so fine I doubt if anyone but a collector would buy one. I—"

"Don't mention the word collector to me," John interrupted. "The last mystery you involved us in when we had scarcely started our lending library concerned collectors of rare books plus a couple of crooks. If any of these old books are rare I vote we give them right back to Mrs. Arnold before you—"

"Don't be silly, John," Ginny wailed. "And stop teasing me. Listen while I explain this mess. I was making a list of the books Mrs. Arnold donated and I'd just got to the R's when I turned around and found that the wacky twins had built an impenetrable forest of books around me.

Wouldn't you think that when they came back from their canvassing trips around town that they'd have had sense enough to stack the books they brought someplace so that we could move around in this hole-in-the-wall?"

"No," John replied easily. "The twins never make sense. You don't always make sense yourself and the same goes for Lucy. By the way, where is she?"

Lucy Tryon, who was as small and blond and plump as Ginny was tall, dark, and slender, was Ginny's best friend. The redheaded Reilly twins, Whiz and Babs, were John's thirteen-year-old cousins. All of them belonged to a club called the Hustlers and their most recent project was the Harristown Book Stall, a portable lending library. John was the president of the club and Ginny, who was very good at math, was the business manager of the Stall which had its headquarters in a small store down by the railroad station. To use Ginny's own words it was "a simply adorable little cubbyhole complete with windows that can be pulled down over the sidewalk display tables when it rains or when we want to lock up at night."

It had formerly been a magazine store and the premises were owned by Mrs. Arnold, Harristown's richest resident. This eccentric little old lady, who was a silent partner in

the lending library, was one of Ginny's best friends and she enjoyed having a finger in all of the Hustlers' pies, especially when anything mysterious happened. Mrs. Arnold loved "whodunits" and fancied herself as an amateur detective, although she was forever saying that Ginny was much smarter at solving mysteries than she was.

"Lucy," Ginny answered John's question, "is off collecting more used books for our sale next week. Everyone is contributing, but we haven't room for the books we have right now, let alone customers."

John began to move some of the books to the office desk and soon Ginny emerged from her fortress.

"Whew!" she gasped with relief as she smoothed her rumpled sweater and skirt. "I was beginning to get claustrophobia. Now what can we do?"

"There's nothing to worry about," John told her, half-grinning, half-serious. "Your father's paper, the well-known *Harristown News*, informs us that we're in for one solid week of glorious Indian summer weather. So all of the books which we plan to sell for less than a dollar can be put on the sidewalk stands. If it should rain we can quickly pull down the windows."

Ginny nodded. "Books with beautiful, expensive bind-

ings like these which Mrs. Arnold donated should be kept on a special shelf inside. Don't you agree, John? I mean, the average person wouldn't want one on account of the fine print, but somebody just might pay more than a dollar on account of the binding."

John picked up a blue leather volume. "Any one of them might be worth several hundred dollars to a collector even if it isn't a rare first edition. To a collector of rare bindings, I mean. This one, for instance, isn't a first edition, but the cover is really exquisite. Look, Ginny! It's *Rhyme? and Reason?*, a collection of Lewis Carroll's satires and parodies and it was printed in London in 1888!"

"Lewis Carroll?" Ginny repeated. "I didn't know he wrote anything but *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*."

"Don't betray your ignorance," John scolded her. "If you haven't read *The Hunting of the Snark*, you should have."

"Of course I've read the *Snark*," Ginny said crossly, "but I thought a man named Dodgson wrote it."

"He did," John said with a grin. "Charles Lutwidge Dodgson used Lewis Carroll as his pseudonym."

Ginny's brown eyes twinkled. "Say it two more times

and then I will believe you.” Then she quoted from the *Snark*:

“Just the place for a Snark!
I have said it thrice:
What I tell you three times is true.”

John chuckled. “Anyway, I don’t think *Rhyme? and Reason?* should be left lying around. I see we have a cheap, battered edition of Jack London’s *The Cruise of the Snark*. It would be just like the twins to get the two books mixed up and sell *Rhyme? and Reason?* for a dime when it’s probably worth a hundred times that.”

“I agree with you,” Ginny said. “I cleared off this shelf just for books like that.” She pointed. “And these. We have a complete set of Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, and James Fenimore Cooper. What price can we put on them?”

John thought for a minute. “We can’t, unless we have them appraised and that would cost too much money. They’re all classics, Ginny, so why don’t we just donate them to the high school library? After all, the whole idea of the sale is to raise money for the high library fund, so—”

“Never,” Ginny said firmly. “The print is so fine no teen-ager would be caught dead trying to read it. Besides,

the school library has all of the classics in modern, easy-to-read editions. The idea of the sale, Mr. Blaketon, in case you've forgotten, is to raise money for new books, current best-sellers. These old things would just clutter up the school library shelves and prove nothing."

"I guess you're right," John said as he glanced through a lovely edition of *Vanity Fair*. "The best thing for us to do is *not* to put any price on these sets. Nobody who comes to the sale is going to try to cheat us. In fact, since everyone knows the proceeds will go to the library fund, everyone will lean over backward to pay us a fair price. Unless," he finished in an ominous tone of voice, "your magnetic personality draws some out-of-town crooks to the sale."

Ginny sighed and sank into the chair behind the desk. "Nobody knows anything about the sale yet. I was supposed to write it all out so Dad could put a notice in the *News* today and again on Monday, but what with homework and basketball, not to mention the fact that Lucy and the twins always disappear just when I need them to help me here—!"

"Well, never mind," John said soothingly. "You and I can write out the facts for your father right now." He coughed importantly, his dark-blue eyes twinkling: "Miss

Gordon, take a letter, please, to the owner and publisher of the *Harristown News* Dear sir: Starting Monday afternoon, November sixth, a sale of secondhand books will be held at the Harristown Book Stall at Station Plaza . . . harrumph. . . . Due to the fact that the Stall is operated by junior-senior high school students, books can be sold only during the hours of three to eight p.m. Proceeds will go to the school library fund . . . harrumph. . . . New paragraph.”

Ginny, who had been scribbling frantically, yelled, “Whoa!”

John encircled his eyes with his index fingers and thumbs and peered through these “specs” at her. “What seems to be the trouble, Miss Gordon? Isn’t your shorthand as good as your bookkeeping?”

“No,” Ginny replied tartly but truthfully. “You know perfectly well, Mr. Blaketon, that I haven’t had enough shorthand lessons yet to take a letter that is dictated at jet-propelled speed.”

John made a tent of his fingers and rested his chin on his thumbs. “Harrumph! Nobody can beat you at bookkeeping, Miss Gordon, but as a stenographer—well, you’re fired.”

Just then the door to the street opened and a stack of

books appeared on the threshold. The stack had pretty legs which ended in wool socks and moccasins and it spoke in a desperately human voice, "Help!"

Ginny and John flew to the rescue and soon unearthed Lucy who moaned:

"That's all. Absolutely all. I'm through, positively and definitely. Everybody, but everybody in town wants to donate books for the sale. And they're not really being charitable at all." Lucy's round blue eyes flashed. "It's just that they want to get rid of a lot of old books that have been gathering cobwebs in their attics for years and years."

It was Ginny's turn to be soothing. "There, there, sweetie," she said, giving Lucy an affectionate hug. "I know it's awfully hot for this time of the year, and I know you hate to handle dusty old things. But don't worry, Lucy. You don't have to do any more canvassing. We already have more books than we have room for. Right now our big worry is to get them sorted."

Lucy *was* very dainty and she did hate untidiness, but she sank down on the floor just as though she were wearing jeans instead of her best faded-blue linen culottes. "That's impossible," she wailed to Ginny and John. "How can we sort books that range from primers and geographies

that were published back in 1900 to current best-sellers which turned out *not* to be best-sellers after all?"

Ginny groaned. "Don't make it sound more difficult than it is, Lucy. John thinks that some of these editions which Mrs. Arnold donated may be very valuable. For instance, this collection of Lewis Carroll's poems. You remember when we read the *Snark* together last summer?"

"I do," Lucy replied, "but Lewis Carroll didn't write it. Jack London did."

"Oh, *no*," John protested. "Can't you ever get anything straight, Lucy?"

For answer Lucy pulled a lock of her shoulder-length blond hair across her face and mumbled: "All I know is that a snark is a cross between a snake and a shark and it all took place in the Pacific Ocean. But who cares?"

"We all do," Ginny cried impatiently. "Somebody might pay us a lot of money for this book and the others Mrs. Arnold donated, so we can't jumble them all together with the others and sell them for the same price."

Lucy scrambled wearily to her feet. "All right. All right. Just tell me what to do, slave-driver."

John started to say something but Ginny silenced him by pointing to her shorthand notes. "If you want to be helpful,

Mr. Blaketon, dash over to Dad's office right now and dictate that letter to his secretary. There still may be time for a write-up in the 'Harristown Happenings' column in the special Sunday edition tomorrow."

John shrugged and departed, elaborately picking his way through the piles of books.

"Sometimes I positively hate John," Lucy told Ginny, "but he's always right and our Stall really is a frightful mess, so let's get right to work sorting the books."

"Frankly, I hardly know where to begin," Ginny confessed, "but *you* are right about one thing, Lucy. We have collected a lot of ancient schoolbooks which nobody would have as a gift. Let's pack all of them into this empty carton and get Whiz to cart it off to the junkman. He just might give us fifty cents. After all, paper in any form is worth something, isn't it?"

"I suppose so." Lucy rolled up the sleeves of her pale pink sweater and donned the frilly apron which she always kept handy.

"I wish I could remember to keep an apron down here," Ginny complained. "This is my best school skirt and I wouldn't blame Mother if she had a fit when she sees it. I shouldn't have worn it on a Saturday but I thought we

might get some customers.”

Lucy sniffed. “No customer in his right mind would put his foot in this Stall. Whew! If I’d known the twins were going to collect so many books I would have quit canvassing ages ago.”

They worked in silence for a while and had half-filled the carton with old textbooks when the Réilly twins burst into the Stall.

“News,” Whiz cried, his freckled face red with excitement. “We have just collected two practically brand-new copies of the current best-seller which is listed as a three-fifty book so we should get at least two bucks apiece for ’em.”

Babs, with a triumphant toss of her red-gold pigtails, placed the books on Ginny’s desk. “There! Don’t say that we never do any work.”

Ginny couldn’t help noticing that the jackets did look brand-new. “What—” she began, but Lucy interrupted.

“Oh, no! Not another copy of Myra Swenson’s novel! I’ve already collected three copies, Ginny. I doubt if we’ll be able to give one of them away.”

Whiz drew himself up to his full height of five feet five inches and glared at her. “And why not, may I ask? I

happen to know that *My Heart's in the City* got rave reviews in all of the New York City newspapers."

"That's true," Ginny agreed. "I read some of them. You must be confused, Lucy. Remember? We bought two copies for the library and they're always out so it must be a very popular novel."

Lucy got up off her knees and dusted them with her finger tips. "It should be popular, Ginny, but it isn't. At least not here in Harristown. A lot of people have borrowed *My Heart's in the City*, but if you'll look in the card index file you'll notice that they sent it back almost immediately."

"So what?" Ginny demanded. "That proves that it's obviously the kind of book which you can't put down until you've finished it."

"That's what you think," Lucy retorted, "but the truth of the matter is, as you'd know if you'd carefully read the reviews, that it's a novel about a small New York City suburb. Everybody I know feels that the authoress was writing about Harristown and that she was poking fun at us."

"Oh me, oh my." Ginny stared at the bright jacket. "I guess I should have read it when we had advance copies.

I didn't gather from the reviews in the papers that it was a satire."

"It isn't; not really," Lucy told her. "But Myra Swenson is a New Yorker who obviously feels that people who live in small Westchester towns like Harristown are, well, rather silly, to put it mildly. I mean, take our secondhand-book sale, for instance. She'd think that we were crazy to get so excited about it."

"Maybe she's right," Whiz put in. "After all our work we probably won't make more than ten bucks or so."

"In New York," Babs added, "when they have a book auction they make millions and millions of dollars. Dad took me to one once on Madison Avenue and it was really very exciting."

Ginny wrinkled her nose. "That, nitwit, was an auction of rare first editions. And listen, Whiz, ten dollars is not to be sneezed at. It'll mean about four new books for the school library and we're due to get a lot of new members from all the publicity the sale will give us. Also, Miss Slater has promised to buy all of the books for the library from now on at our Stall, so we'll make a profit that way, too, on both brand-new and used books."

Whiz whistled shrilly through his fingers. "For Pete's

sake, Ginny, don't talk so fast. You lost me after the first sentence. I'm not sneezing at anything except the dust around herè." He shook a freckled finger under her nose. "Speaking of publicity, I didn't see anything in the *News* today about the sale. That, as I recall, was one of your jobs, madam."

Ginny flushed. "I forgot, but John's over in Dad's office now coping, so there'll surely be something in tomorrow and every day next week."

"Well, okay," said Whiz, "but it strikes me that we have more books than there are people in town who can read."

"That's right," Ginny agreed briskly, "so you two Reillys roll up your sleeves and get to work. The first thing we've got to do is discard books which we know for sure nobody would have as a gift. Like this copy of *Hiawatha* which my Great-Aunt Betsy probably had as a primer when she was in the first grade. You and Babs can finish filling this carton with junk like that while Lucy and I arrange these beautifully bound editions on this special shelf."

"Huh," Babs muttered darkly. "We do the dirty work while you do the glamorous work!"

"'Twas ever thus," Whiz chimed in.

Ginny frowned. "Don't be silly. And listen, all of you. Somebody may be willing to pay a lot of money for one of these complete sets of matching volumes. So let's try not to sell any of them piecemeal."

"That's a very good idea," Lucy approved. "As the business manager, Ginny, you'll have to work inside most of the time. So why don't we make it a rule here and now that nobody but you can sell any of the books on this special shelf? That way we won't get mixed up."

"All right," Ginny agreed, and when John came back she explained the new rule to him.

"Suits me," he said, "except that we may get stuck with the whole lot. So let's say that on the last day of the sale if the sets are still intact and unsold we'll break them up—and break the rule."

He helped Whiz carry the carton of discarded textbooks outside to the now empty wheelbarrow. Complaining bitterly about the heat, Whiz trundled it off.

The other Hustlers worked hard for the rest of the morning. By noon all of the floor space inside the stall was clear and books priced at a dollar or more were neatly arranged on the shelves. Cheaper books were stacked up on the sidewalk display tables and had not yet been sorted. John made

large signs for each one of the four groups:

TEN CENTS—TWENTY-FIVE CENTS—HALF A DOLLAR—

NINETY-EIGHT CENTS

Whiz came back then looking more disgruntled than when he had left. "The junkman," he told them, "wouldn't give me a dime for that stuff. So I had to tote that carton all the way out to the town dump. Whew! Why do I always get stuck with the hot and heavy chores?"

"Oh, dear," Ginny cried, suddenly seized by one of her premonitions. "I wish you had brought that carton back here instead, Whiz."

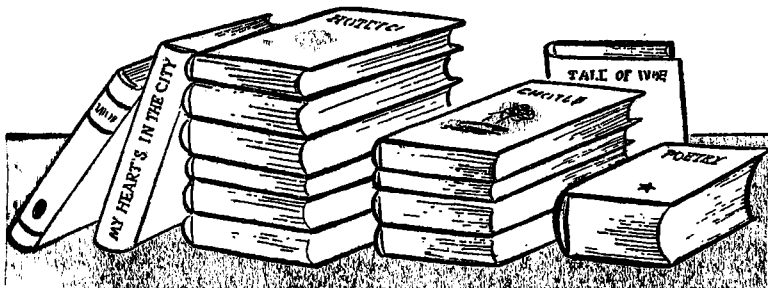
He glared at her, mopping his forehead with the tail of his shirt. "Why on earth would I do such a silly thing? We don't want to clutter up the Stall with that junk."

Ginny said nothing, but deep down inside she felt that she had probably made a mistake when she had decided to discard all of those old textbooks. A few of them might have had a great deal of sentimental value to somebody who would be willing to pay at least a dollar for a primer he had had in his childhood. Furthermore, she certainly should not have let the twins, unsupervised, finish filling that carton. Any book in poor condition might have been tossed into the carton, even though it might have great value to

a collector of rare editions.

“Why, oh, why,” Ginny asked herself, “do I always act so impulsively? Why didn’t I take the time to pack that carton myself before I let Whiz tote it away? I’m as bad as my own Great-Aunt Betsy: Penny-wise and pound-foolish!”

But it was too late now and so she kept silent. She knew perfectly well that if she told John she was worried he would reply with one of his favorite axioms: Why cross a bridge until you come to it?



2 • RHYME? AND REASON?

"Whew!" Whiz complained again. "Hot as August, isn't it?"

"Well, not exactly," John said mildly. "You feel the heat because you have to carry around so much—shall we say, *avoirdu pois*?"

"So much *what*?" Babs demanded.

John grinned. "In simple English, excess weight. If you and Whiz would stop eating between meals—"

"That reminds me," Babs interrupted. "I'm starving." She raced off, pigtails flying behind her.

"The nerve of her!" Lucy cried exasperatedly. "I'm starving, too, and have been ever since the noon whistle blew."

"You girls go have lunch now," John said. "I can guarantee that Whiz isn't starving. I'll bet that since we last

saw him he's consumed no less than two hamburgers and three ice-cream cones."

"What's wrong with that?" Whiz snapped his fingers. "If I hadn't had sufficient calories in my system I'd have collapsed halfway to the dump. The human body is like an engine that is run by electricity. A calorie might be compared with a kilowatt. A calorie is a unit for measuring the heat value of food. A kilowatt is a unit of electrical power. And—"

"We know, we know, Einstein," John interrupted firmly. "Please harness your calories and kilowatts and common ordinary sense, if any, to our present problem. These books on the stands out here have got to be sorted into four groups to match the signs which I have thumbtacked to the tables. Now let's test your mentality. What am I holding in my right hand?"

"A book," said Whiz, grinning mischievously. "A very old, tired, battered book, I might add."

"Good," said John. "Now, I should like you to tell me and the other members of the club why this particular book was not discarded with the others which you have just deposited on the junk heap?"

"Simple," replied Whiz, grinning more broadly. "It

would have been the straw which broke this camel's back."

"No, no, *no!*" Ginny broke in impatiently. "Can't you see, Whiz, that even though the cover isn't in good condition it's a collection of Edna St. Vincent Millay's poems? We should be able to sell it for fifty cents."

"I'll take your word for it, madam business manager," Whiz said so dubiously that Ginny's heart sank. "That's one good thing about poetry. Even if some of the pages are missing, nobody would know the difference. Now this one," he went on airily, "should bring in at least a buck. It's practically brand-new, and most important, it's Jack London's *Whiteface*, one of his very best novels."

Lucy and Ginny groaned in unison and John said, "Don't be a dope all of your life, Whiz! You can tell by the paper and the binding that this edition cost less than a dollar even when it *was* brand-new. So we can't expect to get more than a dime for it."

Whiz collapsed into the wheelbarrow and waved his arms and legs as helplessly as an upside-down beetle. "It's all beyond me," he proclaimed. "You intellectual giants can do the sorting and pricing. I'll just rest here quietly and applaud at the right moments."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Ginny told him flatly.

"Any boy who is such a big wizard when it comes to electricity must have a brain somewhere in his head. Get right out of that wheelbarrow and help John while Lucy and I grab a sandwich at the Grill."

Somehow, before dark, they got the books arranged on the four sidewalk tables. Lucy felt strongly that all of the books which had been written for young people should be stacked on one table, but since there were so few juvenile books among the donations, John and Whiz scoffed at her suggestions.

"If we started to divide them according to ages, Lucy," Ginny added, "we'd have to have about nine tables."

"But," Lucy persisted, "a lot of our friends may come to this sale. They won't want to search through millions of dry old books to find the kind they like."

"Teen-agers of my acquaintance," John informed her loftily, "read the same books that adults do. Of course, a boy of fifteen is much more mature than a girl of fourteen."

"Oh, is that so?" Ginny immediately took sides with her best friend. "It's a known fact, Mr. Blaketon, that girls are always about four years ahead of boys when it comes to intellectual maturity. And Lucy has a point, John. I think



it would be a *very* good idea to have one special table for books which we think our classmates would like. We could include our favorite classics as well as modern books which we've all liked. Goodness knows, as librarians we're in a position to judge. Ever since we've been in business one or all of us has read each and every one of the current best-sellers."

John quickly squelched Ginny's rising enthusiasm. "It's a good idea, but completely impractical because almost every book on the teen-age table would have a different price. This copy of *Quentin Durward*, for instance, is worth a dollar. But that copy of *The Talisman* is in such bad shape that we couldn't ask more than a dime for it. And on one of the shelves inside we've priced a copy of *Ivanhoe*, because of the handsome illustrations, at a dollar-fifty. Furthermore, among the matching sets is my favorite novel by Scott—*The Fair Maid of Perth*. I would certainly include that on the teen-age table because so few kids have even heard of it."

"I would, too," Ginny quickly agreed, "along with *Kidnapped* and *David Balfour*. I always liked them much, much better than I did *Treasure Island*."

"Are you belittling *Treasure Island*?" Whiz demanded.

"Of course not," Ginny retorted. "I love it as much as you do, but I do think a lot of kids read it just the way they do *Ivanhoe* and think they've read the best books Stevenson and Scott ever wrote. Whereas, actually—"

"Never mind the lecture," Babs interrupted. "We get enough of that kind of pep talk from the school librarian. Miss Slater gets positively boring on the subject at times, although I really do love her."

"That's the point," John broke in. "Since the sale is being held for the school library fund, why sell books at it to teen-agers? Why not simply *give* those books to Miss Slater which we think our classmates would like?"

"It would save a lot of bookkeeping," Ginny admitted. "But I still like the idea of a teen-age table. You must have a table in your workshop above your garage, John."

John, whose ambition was to become an architect some day, was as expert in cabinet-making as Whiz was with electrical equipment. During the Hustlers' various projects, and especially when they had run the Swap Shop, the two boys often worked together as a successful team. John now answered Ginny's implied question with:

"Yes, I just finished a nice little table which I'd be glad to donate to the Stall. But how are you going to cope with

the pricing angle on those books, Ginny?"

She snapped her fingers airily. "Easy as pie. I'll buy a dime's worth of stickers and put one on the flyleaf of each book. We won't need to display more than a couple of dozen, John, so pricing them won't take long. As for the matched sets, we aren't going to break them up until the last day so, to use one of your favorite mottoes: Let's not cross that bridge until we come to it."

John chuckled. "To use another of my favorite quotations: A woman convinced against her will is of the same opinion still. Okay, Ginny, go ahead with your teen-age table. But according to parliamentary procedure we should take a vote. All in favor say Aye."

"Aye," they all chorused.

"Our main worry," John went on, "will be to watch out and make sure that all the books don't get mixed up. For instance, if a customer browses through a book on the ten-cent table and puts it back on the dollar table, or vice versa. That can happen, and if it does, one of us will have to correct the situation. *Immediately.*"

"Frankly," Whiz said sourly, "I think we're licked before we start. If we have a big crowd we'll never be able to keep the books from getting mixed up, and if we have a

small crowd we won't make enough money to warrant spending so much time and energy on the sale."

Members who had paid a dollar to join the lending library began coming in then to return books and to borrow others. Taking turns, the Hustlers worked until closing time which was nine o'clock on Fridays and Saturdays. On Sunday morning John brought the table to the Stall and helped Ginny select and price the teen-age books.

"I've decided this was a good idea after all," he said as they surveyed the attractive display.

"I'm sure Miss Slater will approve of it," Ginny said. "Well, I guess we're all set now. Oh, John, I don't know whether to hope for a big crowd on Monday or a small one. The twins are so harum-scarum and Lucy at times is so vague—!"

"I wouldn't worry about a thing if I were you," John told her in that reassuring way of his. "If a lot of people come at once things are bound to be hectic, but nothing really drastic can happen. Everyone in town is so friendly nobody will get mad if we make mistakes."

But Ginny did worry, so much so that on Monday she could hardly concentrate on her schoolwork. Perhaps the sale hadn't been a good idea after all. It was taking up a lot

of the Hustlers' time and the proceeds would not go into their bank account. They still owed Mrs. Arnold the three hundred dollars she had invested in the Stall as a silent partner. It was true that she didn't want them to pay her back, but Ginny had made up her mind to do it before the end of the year. They had a hundred paid members and had collected in rental fees another fifty dollars. But as their business expanded they had had to buy more books so Ginny's check book now showed a balance of less than fifty dollars. She knew that the books which they planned to sell at half-price after they had been circulated throughout the membership represented potentially a hundred dollars, but she wasn't satisfied. While the sale was going on all week the rental part of their business would be virtually at a standstill. Instead of carrying books to members who had joined because it *was* a portable lending library, the twins would be needed at the Stall. This might annoy shut-ins and older people who seldom left their homes. Other members who had formed the habit of dropping in once a week to borrow books might get discouraged if the Stall was always crowded. And yet, if a lot of people didn't come to the sale, all of their effort would have been wasted.

As things turned out, Ginny was right to be worried.

She and John, because they had a study period then, were excused from the last class of the day, and they opened the windows over the sidewalk tables promptly at three o'clock. By three-thirty such a crowd had gathered, both inside and outside, that it was, as Ginny said, impossible to think, let alone act, in a businesslike way.

None of the customers seemed to have the right change for their purchases, so the twins, Lucy, and John were forever coming to Ginny for change. "We'll have to have another cashbox for outside," she whispered desperately to John. "But the bank is closed so how can we convert these bills into coins?"

"Give me those fives," he replied, "and I'll dash up to the grocery store. Mr. Jones can probably give us all the change we need and lend us some sort of a box to keep it in."

After John left, Miss Slater threaded her way to Ginny's desk. The librarian was a small thin woman with short gray hair which was always neatly arranged in smooth waves. She wore rimless glasses which made her look rather old-maidish, but nobody thought of her as being prim and proper; in fact, she was fondly called "Miss Marge" by almost everyone in town.

"Ginny," she began, speaking in a louder voice than usual because of the din inside the Stall, "Mr. Adrian and I are very interested in your teen-age table. We think it shows a good deal of thought, and, as you know, he is the manager as well as the program director of our local broadcasting station. He's planning a new program to be titled *Author Meets Teen-Age Critics*, and we thought that you would be the perfect emcee."

Ginny gulped. Had she heard Miss Slater correctly, or was the confusion affecting her brain? She, Ginny Gordon, a master of ceremonies on a teen-age radio program? It just wasn't possible. Ginny knew her own faults as well as anybody else, and one of them was that she talked too fast. Also, as John and Whiz were forever saying, she was apt to leap from subject to subject in her conversation with the speed of a mountain goat. Surely, Miss Slater was joking.

"I—well, I—" Ginny began and then she stopped.

Carson, old Mrs. Arnold's young, attractive chauffeur was coming through the narrow doorway, and clutching his elbow was his bride, the former Betty Leland. Carson was one of the Hustlers' best friends; he had helped them get out of many a scrape. Betty, who was a very pretty young woman with lovely blue-black hair, was also a friend

of the Hustlers, and both she and her handsome husband were noted for their good dispositions.

But right now Ginny could see that they were very upset about something. They were both frowning and waving frantically to attract her attention.

Mr. Adrian, manager of Broadcast House, joined Miss Slater then and started to say something, but Ginny merely shook her head and begged.

"Please! We'd better talk about this later. I think something awful has happened. Oh, I know I sound crazy, Miss Slater, but please excuse me for a minute. I just have to talk to Mrs. Arnold's chauffeur."

As Ginny slipped out from behind the desk she could see that Mr. Adrian was staring at her curiously and her cheeks flamed with embarrassment. One thing was certain, he *might* have been on the verge of discussing a teen-age radio program with her, but her chance of being the emcee was gone forever. People like Mr. Adrian didn't know Mrs. Arnold as well as the Hustlers did. The little old lady was forever changing her mind and causing all sorts of difficulties, but Mr. Adrian didn't know that, so all he could think was that Ginny Gordon was a girl who had very little poise. And poise was something emcees had to have a lot of.

"Well, it can't be helped," Ginny reflected, and then Carson reached out and grabbed her arm.

"Her highness," he shouted above the din, "wants to take back one of the books she donated. A very valuable blue leather volume, worth about five hundred smackers. Hope to high heaven you haven't sold it."

Ginny breathed a sigh of relief. "You must be talking about Lewis Carroll's *Rhyme? and Reason?* No, Carson, we haven't sold it. It's right over there on that special shelf. I'll—" Ginny stopped and smothered a scream. Miss Slater and Mr. Adrian moved then so that she could see the books in the special section. All of the beautifully bound sets were still intact, but there was no sign of the blue leather volume which should have been the very first book in the top row!



3 • BAD BUSINESS

"But I know it wasn't sold, Carson," Ginny wailed. "Nobody is allowed to sell any of those books but me."

"Don't worry, honey," Betty said soothingly. "One of your customers probably picked it up, browsed through it, and then accidentally put it back on another shelf."

"That's what must have happened." Ginny began to feel better. "Why on earth did Mrs. Arnold send us such a valuable book?"

"She didn't," Carson replied, grinning ruefully. "When her highness told me to pack those sets for you, *Rhyme? and Reason?* got mixed in by mistake. Seems it's usually kept under lock and key in the library bookcase, but for some reason the little old dame took the blue book out to show a guest and left it on the parlor table. When Jenny dusted on Friday she put it in the parlor bookcase and so

I naturally packed it along with the others." His broad shoulders slumped. "Mrs. Arnold wouldn't scold little Jenny for anything so I'm going to get all the blame. You've just got to find that book, Ginny, *before night*."

"Oh, don't be such a big dope." Betty frowned up at her tall husband. "Mrs. Arnold worships the ground you walk on. And you know perfectly well that you're no more afraid of her bawling you out than you are of me."

Carson narrowed his eyes. "Oh, is that so? I'm scared to death of both of you, in case you're interested. And, no kiddin', Ginny has got to find that book or else I've got to produce five hundred smackers."

"Oh, Carson, please don't talk like that," Ginny begged. "If the book is gone, I'm the one who's responsible."

Betty's pretty face had turned pale and all of the merriment had gone out of her eyes. "Five hundred dollars," she murmured. "Why, we'd have to sell our living-room furniture. We only just paid for it last week."

The recently married young couple lived in the gardener's cottage on the Arnold estate, and although the generous old lady had had it completely renovated for them as a wedding present, Ginny knew that both Carson and Betty had spent all of their savings on the furniture.

"Don't you worry, Betty," she said firmly. "If the book is gone I won't let Carson take the blame. I knew it was valuable the minute I saw it—although not *that* valuable—and I should have returned it immediately to Mrs. Arnold." She turned back to her desk quickly so they couldn't see the tears which she was trying to blink away.

"John was right," she said to herself, "when he said, 'If any of these old books are rare I vote we give them right back to Mrs. Arnold.' John is always right. . . ."

"Can you spare a minute, Ginny?"

Ginny looked up and found that Mr. Adrian was perched on the edge of her desk. He was a pleasant-faced man in his late thirties and Ginny knew that he and Miss Slater had been in the same class in high school and had gone through grade school together. Until he became manager and program director of Broadcast House a few years ago, Mr. Adrian had taught English to junior-high students. He was one of those people who are usually described as nondescript because he was neither tall nor short, fair nor dark, fat nor thin, homely nor handsome. Until recently he had lived alone in the family house on Orchard Street. Two weeks ago his sister, Mrs. Warner, with her husband and sixteen-year-old son, had moved in with him.

Chuck Warner was a junior at high and so Ginny had only caught glimpses of him in the corridor between classes. But she had heard a lot about him from girls his own age who described him as:

“—positively dreamy-looking—”

“—what a brain!”

“—definitely the best athlete in high—”

“—but, oh, so silent and grim!”

Ginny had not paid much attention to these remarks. Chuck was, she had admitted to Lucy, very good-looking in a tall, broad-shouldered, well-built way, and he must be very smart because, although he had entered the junior class so late in the term, he was apparently having no difficulty keeping up with the others.

“But,” she had confided to Lucy, “I think he’s awfully stuck-up. ‘I love me, I love me’ is written all over his face. Just because he’s old enough to have a junior driving license is no reason why he should drive to school every single day in his jalopy. Why can’t he walk sometimes, the way the rest of us do?”

“The rest of us don’t walk,” Lucy had pointed out. “We mostly bike to and from school. And Chuck Warner is so tall he’d look silly on a bike. I frankly think he’s something

extra special, and I mean it, Ginny."

Ginny had sniffed disdainfully. "You think he's extra special because he's so aloof. I never could stand the strong silent type of movie and TV hero."

"John," Lucy had put in, tossing her blond hair, "is strong and, compared with you, very silent. He's also a brain, a marvelous athlete, and very good-looking. *Also* I notice that you like him a lot, and vice versa."

"John is different," Ginny had retorted, blushing in spite of herself. "I've known him all of my life. You haven't lived in Harristown very long, Lucy, so you don't understand that in a small town boys and girls can be good friends for years and it doesn't mean a thing. Take Miss Slater and Mr. Adrian. They spend a lot of time together but there's nothing romantic about it."

Ginny smiled at Mr. Adrian now, remembering her talk with Lucy, and said, "It was very nice of you to come to our sale, and I was thrilled when Miss Slater told me that you approve of our teen-age table."

"I more than approve of it," he replied, smiling back at her. "I'm very grateful to you for producing it. At last a pet idea of mine is beginning to jell, and if anything comes

of it, I'll owe the jelling to you."

"I don't quite understand," Ginny began, and was interrupted by a library member who rather impatiently said that she was not there to buy any books but simply wanted to return a whodunit and borrow another one. By the time this transaction was finished, Mr. Adrian was nowhere in sight, but in a minute Miss Slater appeared at the desk and said to Ginny:

"This is neither the time nor the place to discuss that project I hinted at earlier, Ginny. But Hu Adrian and I will be back this evening with the hope that the crowd may have thinned by then. We're both convinced that you would make a perfect emcee for his baby, *Author Meets Teen-Age Critics*. So please let it brew in your subconscious mind until later."

She slipped away leaving Ginny with mixed feelings. But she had little time to think. The sale was proving to be so successful that she had to dismiss everything else from her mind and concentrate on the customers who soon cleaned out the dollar book shelf. The higher-priced books inside the Stall moved rapidly, too, and Ginny could see through the windows that the piles of books on the sidewalk tables were dwindling satisfactorily.

The crowd was beginning to thin at five o'clock, but shortly afterward the Commuters' Train arrived and almost everybody who got off it stopped at the Stall. Then to Ginny's amazement, her Great-Aunt Betsy arrived and so did the twins' and John's grandmother, old Mrs. Blaketon. While Mrs. Wainwright and Mrs. Blaketon were girlhood chums and very fond of each other, their attitudes toward young people were very different. John's grandmother thoroughly approved of teen-age projects, but Ginny's great-aunt thoroughly disapproved of Ginny and referred to her money-making schemes as "very unladylike."

"She'll always think of me as a tomboy," Ginny often complained to her parents. "She just doesn't realize that I've grown up a lot since I left grade school."

Ginny's parents, an attractive, young-minded couple, sympathized with her when Aunt Betsy made things difficult, although Ginny's mother wouldn't allow anyone, not even Ginny's father, to criticize the regal-looking old woman.

"She's really remarkable, Donald," Ginny's mother would protest when Mr. Gordon made a joking remark about her Aunt Betsy, "and you know it."

It was true, Ginny reflected, as she watched the two old

ladies through the window of the Stall. But she did hope that Aunt Betsy would stay outside. She could guess what would happen if the old lady knew that a very valuable book belonging to her crony, Mrs. Arnold, was jumbled up with the others. Aunt Betsy would, to put it mildly, have a fit and would insist that Ginny was a "flighty flibbertigibbet" who should be sent away to a strict boarding school.

Aunt Betsy had expressed her views on this subject as short a time ago as the day after a Halloween party which the Hustlers had given at Ginny's home. Aunt Betsy had been so shocked when she read about it in the "Harristown Happenings" that she had promptly sent for Ginny and her mother. When they arrived in her stately parlor she had informed them in no uncertain terms that:

"Virginia is not being properly reared. In my day fourteen-year-old girls were not permitted to give parties. It is high time that this hoyden was sent away to a young ladies' seminary."

Ginny hadn't listened very attentively to the tirade because she took it for granted that she would never go to any other school but Harristown High. Then, to her horror, that night at dinner her mother had said to her father:

"I've been thinking, Donald, that perhaps Ginny should

go to boarding school. I did at her age and got a great deal out of it."

Ginny had held her breath, feeling sure that her father would pooh-pooh the idea, but instead he had said thoughtfully, "If she gets involved in any more mysteries I'd be in favor of the boarding school idea. As you say, Virginia, she might get a lot out of it. How do you feel about going away to school, Ginny?"

Ginny let her breath out in a long sigh that was practically a moan. "Oh, Dad, I'd die of homesickness if I ever had to leave Harristown for very long. It's the most wonderful place in the whole world and I just love everybody who lives here."

He had chuckled. "Good! You ought to write a book to counteract the one Myra Swenson just had published. Wow! How that woman hates small towns! According to *My Heart's in the City*, we're all narrow-minded, petty, peevish morons who spend most of our time spying on each other and spreading malicious gossip."

To Ginny's relief her parents had changed the subject to a discussion of the latest best-seller, and instead of listening she carried on a silent discussion with herself:

"They haven't quite dismissed the boarding school idea,

Ginny Gordon, so watch your step. If you do anything to get Great-Aunt Betsy going again, it will be just too bad!"

And now, not quite a week later, Ginny was in another scrape—a very serious one if *Rhyme? and Reason?* had accidentally been sold. No record had been kept of the sales, and at least a hundred people had bought books that afternoon. Lucy and John, she was sure, would never have sold the beautifully bound volume without consulting her, even if it had turned up on one of the sidewalk tables by mistake. But the twins were wacky enough to have sold it for a quarter without remembering to whom.

"Maybe it's not too late," Ginny reflected. "If only Aunt Betsy would go home so I could give the Reillys a description of the book and warn them that it must go back to Mrs. Arnold this evening!"

But instead of going home, the two old ladies came inside the Stall accompanied by their equally ancient maids, Riba and Rachel.

"My goodness, Ginny," Mrs. Blaketon cried, "what a great success your sale has been already! Why there are hardly any books left outside and the shelves in here are almost as bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard."

"Yes, Mrs. Blaketon, we've done very well."

Ginny gave her great-aunt a dutiful peck on her withered cheek. "It was awfully sweet of you to come. About the only books we have left which I think might interest you are these matched sets Mrs. Arnold donated."

Mrs. Wainwright rapped impatiently on the floor with her cane. "I'm not interested in buying any of the classics, Virginia. I have every one of them and all of them are bound much more beautifully than those. When you grow up and become a lady, if that is possible, you shall inherit them." She pointed with her cane to the two-dollar shelf. "I understand from John that you have some real bargains there. I'm interested in a copy of *My Heart's in the City* but only if it is in excellent condition."

"I'm interested in buying the same novel, Ginny," Mrs. Blaketon added. "John's parents told me the other day that it will make me furious." She chuckled. "It's been so long since anything made me good and mad that I can't wait to read it."

Ginny handed each of the old ladies a copy of the best-seller. "I haven't read it myself," she said as they paid her, "but I plan to soon. The ones we bought for the library are in constant circulation so it must be a very good book, though I gather that the author makes fun of small towns:"

"She does more than that," Aunt Betsy announced ominously. "If you will recall, Virginia, I was one of the very first members to borrow the book. I now wish to own a copy. In my opinion the locale *is* Harristown and thus I feel that I have been personally insulted. And so I shall reread the book carefully in an effort to find out who she is so that I may write her a letter of protest."

"Oh," Ginny asked, "then you think that Myra Swenson is a pen name?"

"Of course," Aunt Betsy replied irately. "And at one time the woman—if the author is a woman—must have lived in this community. How else could she, or he, have obtained so many facts about us?"

Mrs. Blaketon winked at Ginny and followed Aunt Betsy out to the sidewalk. By that time the customers had dwindled down to a few who were browsing through the books on the ninety-eight-cent table. The minute Aunt Betsy was settled inside her old-fashioned automobile, Ginny darted outside. Before she could stop them, Babs and Whiz, announcing that it was time for their supper, climbed into their grandmother's limousine. Speechless with rage, Ginny watched the big car disappear around the corner.



"They'll be the death of me yet," she told Lucy and John when at last they were alone on the sidewalk. "Something awful has happened."

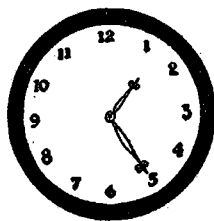
"Awful?" Lucy's blue eyes were round with amazement. "Why, Ginny, we've sold almost every book that was out here. How much money have you got in that box, John?"

"I haven't counted it," John replied, "but my guess is that we've made over thirty dollars right here. How did you make out inside the Stall, Ginny?"

"Just fine," she said impatiently. "Except for the sets there's hardly enough stock left to continue the sale. But that's not what I'm talking about. Carson brought us that Lewis Carroll book by mistake and Mrs. Arnold wants it back. It's worth five hundred dollars."

"Wha-at?" John clutched his wavy black hair with both hands. "Why on earth didn't you hand it right over to Carson when he and Betty were here?"

"I couldn't," Ginny retorted, almost yelling. "It isn't anywhere inside the Stall and I don't see it anywhere out here. It must have somehow got mixed up with the cheaper books and one of the twins has sold it!"



ON THE AIR

4 • GINNY GORDON—STAR!

“Wow!” Even John who usually kept calm, no matter what scrape they were in, was so horrified that Ginny could hardly keep from bursting into tears right there on the sidewalk.

“Wow is right,” she said, twisting one of her chestnut curls nervously. “Carson feels that he’s responsible and so if we don’t find the book right away he’ll have to give Mrs. Arnold five hundred dollars.”

“That’ll never happen,” John said firmly. “We’re the ones who are to blame. I should have had sense enough to know that it was a very rare and valuable edition of *Rhyme? and Reason?* In fact, I did know from the binding that it was rare, but not that rare.”

“I’m the one who’s to blame,” Ginny said in a small voice. “I was supposed to keep track of the books on that

special shelf, and I did, but I couldn't keep my eyes glued to them every single minute."

"Of course you couldn't." Lucy flew to the protection of her best friend. "And I don't believe it's gone. Come on, Ginny, let's all go inside and search."

"It's certainly not on any of the tables here," John agreed. "It would stick out like a sore thumb, and that's why I don't believe the twins sold it. Even they would know that it was worth much more than ninety-eight cents. So it must be inside."

Ginny brightened. "It's not on any of the shelves where we put books for sale. If it were, as you say, John, it would stick out like a sore thumb because the shelves are practically empty. But it might have somehow got mixed up with our rental books. I didn't think about looking there."

But it wasn't with the rental books, and neither had it slipped down behind any of the matching sets. Nor was it in any of the desk drawers, so in the end Lucy and John had to admit that it must have been sold accidentally.

"I'll bike right out to the Reillys' now," John offered, "and ask the twins if they remember whom they sold it to. I'm sure they couldn't have forgotten the sale of a book with such an unusual binding."

"They won't remember," Ginny said dismally. "They never remember that kind of thing, especially not when there's been a lot of confusion. It isn't as though we wrapped the books. Why, half of the time when I sold books inside I didn't even glance at the titles."

"Well, maybe *you* sold it by mistake," John suggested, half-teasing, half-seriously.

"Don't be ridiculous," Ginny blurted crossly. "I did more than glance at the bindings, and I can assure you, Mr. Blaketon, that nobody even tried to buy any of the books on that special shelf. Mr. Adrian did seem interested in the Thackeray set, but all he did was browse while he was waiting to talk to me. Oh," she interrupted herself, "I forgot all about that."

"All about what?" John demanded curiously.

"Never mind now," Ginny said quickly. "After you get back from the Reillys' will be soon enough. And you might as well have supper while you're gone, John. Lucy and I can eat later. More customers will be arriving soon—people who can only come after their businesses have closed for the day. If you're hungry, Lucy, go along with John. I personally have lost my appetite and I don't expect to find it until we find *Rhyme? and Reason?*"

"Well, I am rather hungry," Lucy admitted, "and I'm also dying to find out what the twins have to say. If they remember who bought the book, John can get it back right away by simply explaining that it was all a mistake."

"Well, I'm glad you two aren't worried," Ginny said as she went to the door with them. "The only thing I'm happy about is that Mother doesn't expect me home for supper. I told her this morning that we'd probably be busy here all day and she said it would be all right if I ate at the Grill. If she saw me in my present state of mind she'd know I was in some sort of scrape, and then I'd be shipped off to boarding school."

"Now, Ginny." John sandwiched one of her hands in both of his. "Stop crossing bridges before you come to them. In the first place, I'll probably come back with the book, and in the second place, you're exaggerating that boarding-school business. The only reason why your parents might take you out of high would be if you got mixed up in another mystery involving dangerous criminals. But this is all very simple."

"Maybe a crook did steal the book," Lucy put in. "If it's worth five hundred dollars—"

"Don't be an idiot," Ginny cried. "Every single person

who came to the sale was someone we've known all of our lives. Isn't that right, John?"

He nodded and let go of her hand. "But that's no reason for yelling at Lucy, Miss Gordon. She has *not* lived in Harristown all of her life."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Ginny said contritely. "Please forgive me, Lucy. It's just that I'm so upset about a lot of things. For the first time in my life I *don't* want to get involved in a mystery. If I do, and end up as usual on the front page of the paper, I'm positive that Dad and Mother will agree with Aunt Betsy that a ladies' seminary is the only safe place for me." She wrinkled her nose. "It'll probably be just like that awful place Becky Sharp went to with Amelia in *Vanity Fair*."

Lucy giggled. "Now you are letting your imagination run away with you, sweetie. Modern boarding schools aren't like that. As a matter of fact, if we went together and were roommates, I think it would be fun."

"Well, I don't," Ginny said tartly and added quickly, "Being with you would be fun, Lucy, but—oh, never mind. Run along. I'll try to take my mind off my worries by figuring out our profits."

Ginny had just finished her bookkeeping when Mr.

Adrian appeared at the door of the Stall.

"I'm glad to find you alone," he said with that nice smile of his. "I'm really serious about that teen-age radio program, Ginny. Marge Slater agrees with me that you would be the perfect emcee."

"But I don't know anything about radio programs," Ginny protested. "I've got stage fright just thinking about appearing on one, and as for being mistress of ceremonies—"

"It's really quite simple," he interrupted, perching on the edge of her desk. "You can pick up all the business about signals to and from the control room in an hour. The hard work will be getting together a good panel . . . *in time*. We'd like to launch the program two weeks from Friday—the day after Thanksgiving, November twenty-fourth. Do you think you could be ready by then?"

Ginny shook her head bewilderedly. "I have no idea what you mean by a panel, Mr. Adrian."

He laughed. "I thought Marge had told you more than she apparently had time for. This is my plan and I'd like to know what you think of it. You, as emcee, will choose a book which you think your classmates will enjoy discussing over the air with the author. I thought we ought to have both junior and senior high represented with two

boys and two girls on the panel. Once you have decided on the book, you will contact the author and ask him or her to appear with a panel of teen-age critics. When I say critics, I mean just that. You'll have to choose boys and girls who have above-average intelligence when it comes to reading, so they can ask the author truly critical questions. For instance, if a youngster doesn't like the book as a whole, or in part, he should tell the author so, and why. Another may want to praise the book and ask the author how such-and-such an effect was achieved. Others may want to ask the author where he got his ideas; how much research he had to do; how long it took him to write it; how it feels to be a celebrity. Questions like that, Ginny. You can think of dozens more, I'm sure."

Ginny nodded, her cheeks flushed with excitement. "It all sounds perfectly wonderful, Mr. Adrian, and I know there are lots of boys and girls at high who would be thrilled to appear on a radio program with a famous author."

"True," said Mr. Adrian cautiously, "but, in choosing them, Ginny, you'll have to be a sort of detective-psychologist. If I were you I would start out with the most popular boys and girls in school. They are apt to be well-adjusted,

and that's very important. Volume in a voice on the air stems from self-confidence, inner convictions. Warmth in the tones comes from unselfishness, awareness of others. The voice of a self-centered or insecure boy or girl, for instance, is often too high-pitched—squeaky. We'll want variety in the voices, too, so that the listening audience will be able to distinguish between members of the panel."

Ginny caught her breath. "If voice is so important, wouldn't it be a good idea for me to pick out boys and girls who are members of the Dramatics Club, the Debating Society, the choral group, and the band? And so far as a sense of inner security is concerned, how about the brightest kids in each class even though they may not be the most popular?"

"All good sources," Mr. Adrian agreed. "But you'll still have to do some expert screening. The boy or girl who gets straight A's may have been pushed by over-ambitious parents. That type is apt to be high-strung. They'll speak too quickly, stutter, or try to get across too many ideas in one sentence. Youngsters who lead the class, not of their own volition, generally get high marks in written exams, but fall down badly in oral recitations."

Ginny nodded soberly. "I know what you mean. We

have both oral and written book reviews in English. It's amazing how poor the 'brains' are when they have to give oral reports on what they've read. Maybe I'd better forget about the class geniuses. How about the class comedians? They certainly never seem to lack poise."

"Good," he approved, "but you'll have to screen out those whose poise is only on the surface. Plenty of kids clown around simply to hide their shyness. They're only funny because you see their antics. That won't do on the air. On the other hand, a natural-born comedian can get a laugh by uttering one word at the right moment. Because, you see, he doesn't do it to gain applause, he does it simply because it seems like a good idea at the moment. Limelight-seekers of any kind never go over on the air. They're apt to hog the mike, for one thing, and when interrupted, which of course they must be at times by the emcee or moderator, they'll shout into the mike instead of graciously yielding. So don't choose a domineering class-mate whatever you do."

Ginny moaned. "We seem to have eliminated everybody but the shy, retiring types. They couldn't possibly be any good on the panel, could they?"

"A thousand times no," Mr. Adrian replied strongly.

"That type is almost certain to be an over-protected or too-sheltered child. He may be easy to get along with, and is apt to have a soft, pleasing voice. But if—unlike you Hustlers—his parents have never allowed him to make his own decisions, if they have always extricated him from scrapes instead of encouraging him to stand on his own two feet—well, that boy will be lacking in drive and individuality. He will be incapable of asking a single stimulating question and his replies will be a flat yes or no." Mr. Adrian raised his eyebrows. "Unlike a witness in a courtroom, nobody on the radio should ever limit his answers to a monosyllable. Every reply should be qualified, whether in the negative or the affirmative, by a direct and to-the-point sentence. Better still, the conversational ball is kept a-rolling if the members of the panel answer a question with a question."

Ginny laughed. "Sounds as though we were going to disobey all rules of polite behavior, but I think I have the general idea, Mr. Adrian. My only worry now is that if we kids have to do a lot of rehearsing, it may interfere with homework and school activities. If so, our parents and teachers will complain like anything."

Mr. Adrian smiled reassuringly. "We definitely don't

want you to rehearse beforehand. Too much rehearsing means stilted dialogue. You and the members of your panel will want to discuss the book in general in order to make sure that everyone will have plenty to say. It's only a half-hour program, after all, and a few minutes before we go on the air, we'll have a brief warm-up period with you kids and the author you choose. I guarantee you that you'll all be enjoying yourselves so thoroughly during the warm-up period that only you, the emcee, will know when you're actually on the air."

"It does sound like fun," Ginny admitted. "I've completely recovered from my imaginary stage fright."

Mr. Adrian frowned thoughtfully. "It *will* be fun, Ginny, but you mustn't forget that it's serious business, too. As you know, our local broadcasting station is WHBH—Harristown Broadcast House. We hook up with other big stations at certain times and your program will be on a state-wide hookup. It's what we call a public service broadcast because we hope that it will encourage other teenagers to read, and to give their opinions of what they are reading. Thus we will be appealing to a specialized audience: parents, teachers, and teen-agers themselves. So we automatically fall into another category, too—it will

definitely be a cultural program."

GINNY shuddered. "Now I *am* scared. Words and phrases like *public service* and *cultural*. . ."

He interrupted with a chuckle. "*Commercial* is the only word you have to fear! And that's why we have to act quickly. That segment of time—eight to eight-thirty on Friday evenings—has always been paid for by Shoemaker's Department Store. You know Mr. Shoemaker very well. Ginny, I'm sure that you bought the attractive clothes you're wearing in his High-Jinx department here in town. But you may not know that the Shoemaker Togs for Teens have been advertised throughout the country over our network for the past eighteen months. Mr. Shoemaker's contract ends on the Friday before the Thanksgiving holidays begin. He has given every indication to me that he will not renew his contract because he was not too pleased with the quiz program we offered him. However, I'm sure that the *Author Meets Teen-Age Critics* idea will appeal to him. If your broadcast on the Friday after Thanksgiving is a success, he will sign up again immediately for that segment of time, because advertising for Christmas sales begins on that date. So you can see why I had to choose November twenty-fourth. If we don't sign up Mr. Shoemaker that

very evening, we shall have lost him forever."

Ginny sighed. "No matter how cultural a program may be, and even though it might turn out to be a great public service, somebody has to pay for the time. Is that right, Mr. Adrian?"

"That's right," he said. "I knew that you, with your business-management experience, would understand. Your instructor in that course, Mr. Wales, recommended you highly today along with Miss Slater. So I know you'll also understand how important the pre-broadcast publicity is going to be. Your show will make or break the whole sequence of the program. Ignoring the commercial angle, if it receives state-wide approval as a cultural and public service broadcast, famous authors, represented by their agents and publishers, will be clamoring to appear as guests. The very fact that we have reviewed a book will help the sale of it, but you, Ginny, will have to start from scratch. That means choosing the book you plan to review wisely and well. A strictly juvenile title, naturally, would not appeal greatly to the adults who will be listening. Conversely, a strictly adult novel would not arouse much enthusiasm among you teen-agers. But the books you displayed on your teen-age table proved conclusively to me

that you will choose just the right book and author." He held out his hand. "Only one thing more: Sure I've given you enough time?"

"Oh, yes," Ginny cried enthusiastically. They shook hands solemnly. "I've already thought up the titles of several books which would be perfect and I can choose my panel tomorrow during lunch."

"Good." He started for the door. "If you have any questions or run into any difficulties, don't hesitate to call on me. I'm in my office at Broadcast House weekdays from eight to four."

He disappeared in the semidarkness of the street and Ginny danced around the cubbyhole, singing to herself. This was the most thrilling thing that had ever happened to her! She, Ginny Gordon, was going to be emcee of a radio program which would be broadcast throughout the whole state of New York! If it was a success there might be a *nation-wide* hookup and then she would be famous.

"By the time I finish high," she decided exultantly, "I should be able to get a job with a big radio station in the City. They'll pay me an enormous salary and I'll have a dozen people working for me. It will be called the Ginny Gordon Show and I'll interview national and international

celebrities: presidents and kings and queens and prime ministers. I'll—"

A shrill whistle broke the bubble of her daydream. She whirled around and found that Whiz was standing in the doorway. "For Pete's sake, Ginny, has this *Rhyme? and Reason?* thing made you lose your own reason?"

Ginny came down to earth with a bang. "Whiz," she cried, "do you remember who bought it?"

"No," he said, "because I didn't sell it. And neither did Babs."

Ginny sank down behind her desk with a moan. "Are you positive?"

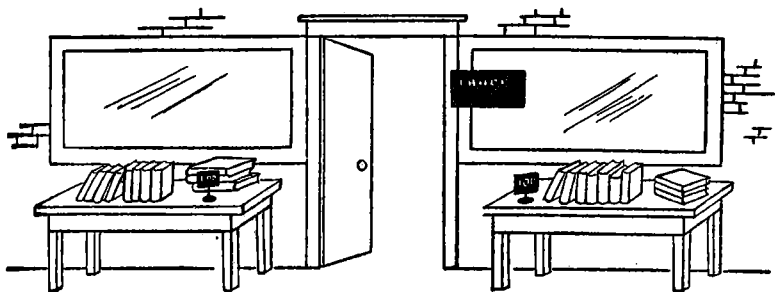
"Absolutely, positively, but definitely." Whiz snapped his fingers emphatically. "Not one of the books we sold could have been called even an unreasonable facsimile of the book John described. I guess I know a leather binding when I see it and so does Babs, feeble-minded as she is. Besides, if anyone had seen such a priceless volume as 'R and R' on one of the display tables, he or she would have brought it to our attention. Our customers didn't come to the sale to gyp us, Ginny, and you know it."

"And they didn't come to steal from us either," she stormed. "Yet the book has disappeared. How do you

explain that little fact, mastermind?"

He shrugged. "It's a mystery all right."

Ginny shuddered. "Don't mention that word to me. There's nothing mysterious about it. Somebody bought it and that means one of us sold it. I frankly suspect Babs." Suddenly she screamed. "Whiz! The dump! That's where it is. Somehow it must have got into that carton you toted away on Saturday!"



5 • "MORE THAN YOU CAN CHEW"

"Now calm down, Ginny." John's eyes were smiling but his mouth was grim. "This is no time for hysterical accusations. Whiz has promised to bike out to the dump after school tomorrow. Chances are good that the carton is still there with the contents intact."

Ginny sniffed. "One chance in a million, you mean. Oh, why did I let those wacky twins finish packing those books?"

"There's no use crying over spilled milk." John pulled down the windows over the sidewalk display. "Let's close up shop and go home. And let's think about the good things in life for a change. We made almost sixty-five dollars today, and practically all we've got left are the matching sets. Before the end of the week we should be able to sell them, piecemeal, or at fifteen dollars per."

But Ginny refused to be cheered up. As they walked along Main Street, she said, "If Whiz doesn't bring 'R and R' back tomorrow, we'll owe Mrs. Arnold eight hundred dollars, and I did so hope to pay her back everything by the first of the year. Now we'll never be able to pay her back—never, never *never!*"

John sighed patiently. "I hate to be repetitious, Ginny, but honestly, you must stop worrying before things happen. If it'll make you feel any better, I'll bike out to the dump tomorrow before school. And I'll present you with the book as a breakfast present."

Ginny couldn't help smiling through her tears. John could really be so sweet at times! "No," she told him. "I'm not in that much of a hurry to hear the worst. And don't try to fool me, John. You know as well as I do that trash collections are made on Monday mornings. If all of the town's junk was dumped on top of that carton we'd need a steam shovel to excavate it."

Just then Mrs. Arnold's limousine stopped beside them. "Well, did you find the book?" Carson demanded, pushing his cap back on his head. "Don't bother to answer, Ginny. I can see by the expression on your face that you didn't."



John started to tell what had happened but as soon as he mentioned the word dump, Carson exploded. He tossed his cap on the seat beside him and clutched his thick brown hair. "Oh, *no!* If that's where it is it would take a mole to find it— *if* the rats haven't already chewed it to bits!"

Ginny shuddered. Rats were the reason why she hadn't biked right out to the dump to search that very night.

"How on earth did that book get mixed up with junk?" Carson was asking in a voice as pathetic as a bleat.

"The twins—" Ginny began and the bleat became an anguished shout:

"Those Reillys, especially Babs! I might have known she was at the root of this evil. Whiz is a genius so you can forgive his wacky moments, but that little girl was born with no brains to speak of."

"It wasn't really her fault," Ginny added loyally. "When I told them to finish filling the carton with those old textbooks I should have made sure that nothing of value was within arm's length. I could have sworn that I put 'R and R' on the special shelf, but—"

"Never mind the gory details," Carson interrupted. "My goose is cooked, but good. I wouldn't mind for myself, but Betty—well, you know her. She can't stand being in debt."

We waited five years before we got married and pinched every penny until it screamed so we wouldn't have to buy even a bread board on time. And now—"

"Listen, Carson," John broke in quietly. "Go on back and tell Mrs. Arnold what happened and then you and Betty forget about that book. If I can't find it at the dump tomorrow I'll assume full responsibility as president of the club, and, I might add, the oldest member."

Carson grinned. "Good boy, John. If we all take the blame the little old dame may decide to forgive us all and skip it. When you get right down to it, the whole thing was really her own fault although I wouldn't tell her so for the world. She spends so much time pretending that she's eccentric and putting on a big act, it would break her heart to let her know that she really *is* absent-minded. If the book's so darn valuable why didn't she have someone put it back in the library the minute she was through with it? I mean, with a maid and a housekeeper and a cook and a laundress on the premises, there's no excuse for leaving valuables hanging around."

"That's right," Ginny agreed, her spirits rising. "If we don't find the book, Carson, I'll see her tomorrow and tell her it was all my fault, which it was."

Carson chuckled. "That's the best idea yet. You're a great favorite of hers, Ginny, and if you throw yourself on her mercy I'll bet she'll admit that the book means nothing to her. She's raising a big fuss now, and I can tell you why. Things have been too boring for her since you solved that last mystery, Ginny. You know, Betty acts as her part-time secretary and my bride told me the other evening that her highness has been complaining bitterly that you kids don't let her have enough to do with the running of the lending library."

Ginny gasped. "Why, that's not true. The secondhand-book sale was originally Mrs. Arnold's idea. I wasn't much in favor of it but it's useless to argue with her when she has her heart set on something. And that proves my point. Mrs. Arnold is a darling, but as long as she is our silent partner she's going to try to run things. Sooner or later she'll produce an idea which would ruin us if we tried to carry it out. That's why I want to pay back her investment as soon as possible."

"Well, don't do anything to get her riled now," Carson advised Ginny. "Even if she orders you to hire an army of moles to search the dump, do it. Although ants would probably be more in her line because they'd take longer.

Suspense," he finished as he started the motor, "is the breath of life to Mrs. A."

He drove off, and Ginny and John continued along Main Street to the pretty house on Maple where Ginny lived. Because it was such a warm evening the windows were open, and as they climbed the steps to the front porch Ginny could hear the radio. That reminded her of the teen-age program and she immediately began to tell John about it.

Halfway through her excited recital he collapsed on the glider and pulled her down beside him. "Honestly, Ginny, you make neither rhyme nor reason. I'm beginning to think your Great-Aunt Betsy is right. Boarding school is the only safe place for you!"

Ginny stared at him in amazement. "You're the one who isn't making sense. I guess if people like Mr. Adrian and Miss Slater think the program is a good idea, you certainly can't have any objections."

"The program," he said calmly, "is an excellent idea. It's having you the emcee that I object to."

Ginny tossed her chestnut curls. "And what's wrong with me? You're forever saying that I have a priceless gift of gab and that I'm completely lacking in timidity and that I have—"

He held up one hand for silence. "Enough. I admit that you were born with all of the qualifications to make the best teen-age mistress of ceremonies in the world. What you lack is time. T-i-m-e. Only Saturday you were complaining about that factor, and I quote: '—what with homework and basketball—' "

"Stop it," Ginny interrupted crossly. "I was complaining because getting ready for the sale was taking up so much time, but that's just about over now. We've already made so much money it doesn't matter whether we sell those matching sets or not. I for one am not going to worry about them. I'm going to spend all my spare time from now on arranging that first broadcast. That's final."

John sighed. "Then you're resigning as business manager of the Stall?"

"Of course not!" Ginny's brown eyes flashed. "But everything is so well organized now it practically runs itself. There's no reason why all of you can't wield that rubber date stamp as well as I can."

John shook his head. "One person has got to be in charge of the files, Ginny, and you know it. If you want to quit, I'll take over, but I think you're making a mistake. Even without the Stall, you're going to find that you've

bitten off more than you can chew."

Ginny jumped to her feet. It had been a long, nerve-racking day and she couldn't help snapping, "I am *not* going to quit the Stall, and I have *not* bitten off more than I can chew. Furthermore, Mr. Blaketon, I wish you would stop using old, hackneyed quotations when you talk about me. It gets boring. Also, I wish you'd stop forever giving me advice when I don't need it." The moment Ginny finished speaking she wished she had bitten off her tongue. John was very slow to anger, but once his anger was aroused he stayed mad for a good long time.

He stood up and said tautly but with ominous quiet, "Very well, if that's the way you feel. But when you get into hot water don't come running to me. I wash my hands of you and that radio program here and now."

He stalked down the steps and disappeared in the shadow cast by the street light. Ginny flung herself face down on the glider cushions and burst into tears.



6 • MRS. ARNOLD IS ANGRY

Tuesday was a dreary, sunless day and Ginny woke up with a headache. She had cried herself to sleep the night before and now her quarrel with John seemed like a nightmare. All of their lives they had had little spats but they usually made up right away. But the scene last night had been an ugly one and it was she, Ginny Gordon, who had created it.

"I was insulting and horrid and untruthful," Ginny scolded herself as she showered and dressed. "John is never boring and he never gives me advice unless I need it. Also he's always right when we argue and I'm always wrong so if I have any sense I'll tell Mr. Adrian right away that I can't be the emcee."

But a few minutes later something happened which changed Ginny's mind. At breakfast her father said, "Mr.

Adrian called us last night to discuss that radio program he wants you to emcee. He said you had accepted but he wanted to be sure that we approved."

"I think it's a very exciting idea," Mrs. Gordon put in. "It's the kind of thing you could do awfully well, Ginny. You love to read as much as you love to talk."

"Exactly." Mr. Gordon chuckled. "And the work involved will certainly keep you out of mischief. I'm all for it, Ginny. It's the kind of project which should encourage other kids to develop good reading habits. That's important. Most psychiatrists agree that rare indeed is the juvenile delinquent who likes to read."

"And," Mrs. Gordon added, "we were terribly pleased, dear, that Mr. Adrian and Miss Slater chose you. I'm really surprised that he didn't pick his own nephew. I understand that Chuck Warner is a very bright boy."

Ginny sipped her orange juice. "But I don't think Chuck would be a good emcee—too grim and silent. You know I wanted to ask him to our Halloween party, but every time I got a chance to speak to him he gave me such a sour look that I decided he was definitely antisocial."

Mr. Gordon guffawed. "I'm afraid when it comes to boys you're prejudiced, Ginny. And I don't blame you. There

aren't many lads like John in this world. But to get back to *Author Meets Teen-Age Critics*. Can you handle it and the Stall and not have your school work suffer?"

"There's basketball, too," Mrs. Gordon reminded Ginny.

"There won't be any important games until next month," Ginny said quickly. "We do practice a lot, but mostly during the gym period." Suddenly Ginny made up her mind. Everybody, including her own parents, thought that John was practically perfect, and her father had just implied that she thought so, too. Well, nobody was perfect and she would prove to John that he had been wrong this time. Aloud she said, "Anyway, I'm not sure that I'll stay on the first team. Not if it interferes with my emcee job. I'm thinking seriously of making radio my career. My future is more important than basketball."

Mr. Gordon dropped his fork with a clatter. "Good heavens, Ginny! Last year you were captain of the team. Does this radio business really mean so much to you?"

"And," Mrs. Gordon put in soberly, "if it continues indefinitely would you give up the idea of going to college?"

Too late Ginny realized that she had made a tactical error. She could tell by the startled expression on her parents' faces that boarding school was uppermost in their

minds. If only she hadn't said what she had about basketball.

She squared her shoulders. "I didn't mean that I don't want to go to college," she told her mother truthfully. "And I probably will stay on the first team. The broadcast may be a flop. Then that will be that."

"That's no way to approach the assignment," her father said sternly. "If you tackle it you must try to do the very best job possible. Mr. Adrian gave me the impression that it wouldn't be time-consuming enough to interfere with your other activities."

"It won't be," Ginny said promptly. "And if you and Mother don't object, I would like to try it."

"Very well." Mr. Gordon smiled; he never stayed in a stern mood for very long. "You'd better run along now or you'll be late to school. And that would *not* be a good beginning."

While Ginny was waiting for the light at the corner of Maple and Main Streets, Lucy joined her. "Where's your bike, Ginny?" she asked curiously.

"I've decided not to ride it any more," Ginny replied. "Now that I'm a radio emcee I think I ought to stop all that tomboy stuff."

Lucy gasped. "Have you lost your mind, Ginny Gordon?"

The light changed and when they had crossed the street Ginny told Lucy all about the proposed program. Lucy was so thrilled by the news that she dropped her bike on the sidewalk and threw her arms around Ginny.

"It's simply marvelous, sweetie. I'm so proud of you. But don't ask me to be on the panel, ever. I'd die of stage fright the minute I put my foot inside Broadcast House. John will be wonderful though. Who else have you thought of—I mean, whom?"

"John," Ginny said defiantly as they continued on toward school, "is out. Completely out of the picture. He doesn't approve, although my own parents plus Mr. Adrian and Miss Slater do approve. Can you imagine anyone so silly as John in this whole world?"

Lucy giggled. "You sound as though you two had had a fight."

"We have," Ginny informed her with forced nonchalance. "I told him exactly what I thought of him last night so I doubt if he ever speaks to me again. Nothing would suit me better. I'm sick and tired of his treating me as though I were tied to his apron strings."

Lucy went off into gales of laughter. "John in an apron!

Oh, Ginny!" Then she sobered. "Why doesn't he approve?"

"I really don't know," Ginny fibbed loftily. "He was talking in trite quotations as usual so he didn't make much sense."

"John always makes sense," Lucy corrected her firmly. "At times I hate him for it, so I don't blame you for being mad at him now. But I'd think twice if I were you before not taking his advice, whatever it was."

Ginny, holding her head with Great-Aunt Betsy erectness, stalked along in silence. Things had come to a pretty pass when even her best friend sided with John against the opinions of older people! When they reached the wide front steps of the school they found that the others were waiting for them.

"Good morning, Lucy," John said, pointedly ignoring Ginny. "We have bad news. Whiz and I biked out to the dump this morning and the carton was indeed buried, as we feared, under a small mountain of trash."

"Oh, dear," Lucy moaned. "Now what'll we do?"

"There's nothing we can do," Whiz retorted, "unless you girls want to spend the rest of your lives picking your way through broken bottles, tin cans, and garbage."

Lucy shuddered. "I wouldn't go near that rat-infested

place for all the valuable books in the world. What do you think the next step is, Ginny?"

"I'll go see Mrs. Arnold right after school," Ginny said dolefully. "Will you lend me your bike, Lucy, and take my place in the Stall?"

"Yes, to the bike," Lucy replied, "but I'm not crazy about the idea of being in charge of those expensive matching sets. Suppose somebody wants to buy *The Last of the Mohicans*, but not the others by Cooper? Or all of the Waverley Novels except *Pendennis*?"

"Oh, Lucy," Ginny cried. "Scott didn't write *Pendennis*. It's by William Makepeace Thackeray, and you know it."

Lucy laughed. "Speaking of making peace, why don't you and John? If you two aren't going to speak to each other we might as well give up the Stall right now."

But the warning bell rang then and they all hurried off to their home rooms. During lunch Ginny asked two of her classmates if they would be on her panel. It took what seemed like hours to explain what would be expected of them and in the end they flatly refused. Ginny was not discouraged but she couldn't help wondering if perhaps selecting the panel might take longer than she had anticipated. Suppose all of the others on her mental list refused,

too? Maybe that was what John had meant when he said that she had bitten off more than she could chew.

"Oh, good heavens," she scolded herself, "can't you ever stop thinking about John?"

The answer to that she discovered was no. All during the hot muggy bike trip out to the Arnold estate she thought about John. If only he were going with her! Mrs. Arnold was forever saying that he reminded her of her "dear, kind husband." John's very presence would put her in a receptive mood. And if she really was as "riled" as Carson claimed, John would know just the right things to say.

"John, John, John," Ginny muttered fiercely as she left her bike beside the mansion's steps. "I'll make a success of that broadcast if it kills me, just to spite you."

Jenny, the pretty little maid, answered her knock. Jenny and Lila, the Gordons' maid, had been graduated from high school the year before and they were both good friends of the Hustlers.

"Hi, Ginny," Jenny greeted her. "Hot, isn't it, or is it the humidity?"

"Both," Ginny replied, mopping her face with her handkerchief. And then she heard Mrs. Arnold's voice booming from the parlor:

"Is that you, Ginny? Come here at once."

Ginny obeyed with a sinking heart. When Mrs. Arnold boomed it meant she was really "riled" about something.

The frail little old lady was seated on the sofa in the huge overfurnished room. Like Aunt Betsy and old Mrs. Blaketon she was never without a gold-headed cane and today she was also clutching a silver lorgnette in one tiny blue-veined hand. She gestured with it, indicating that she wished Ginny to sit beside her, and said in a conspiratorial whisper:

"Well, I see you didn't bring the book. That means it was stolen. Carson spun a tall tale about it getting mixed up with some old geographies and such but I didn't let him fool me for one minute. Whom do you suspect, Ginny? Are there any strangers in town? Yes, of course there must be. No resident would commit a robbery. In spite of what that awful Myra Swenson would have you believe, we are all peaceful, friendly people. Her book so infuriated me that I read it twice. Positively scandalous. She should be sued for libel. But that's neither here nor there. Please stop changing the subject and answer my question. *Whom do you suspect?*"

Ginny, who had been trying valiantly to follow Mrs.

Arnold's jumble of words, said hastily, "Nobody stole your book, Mrs. Arnold. Carson was right; it did get mixed up with some books Whiz carted away to the dump on Saturday. Unfortunately, the carton is now buried under a week's collection of trash so I'm afraid—"

"Nonsense," the little old lady interrupted tartly. "My dear Ginny, do you think I am insane? Are you implying that I am senile? You, of all people! I have always respected your intelligence and ask in return that you respect mine."

"Yes'm," Ginny said meekly.

Mrs. Arnold pounded the floor with her cane. "Do you expect me to believe you when you say that a valuable book like that is buried under a heap of trash at the dump? Goodness gracious, Ginny, don't you realize that it is the only copy in existence of *Rhyme? and Reason?* with that particular distinctive binding? The fortunate person who owns matching copies of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* would pay me any price I asked for the third volume in the set."

"Then it's worth more than five hundred dollars?" Ginny asked miserably.

The old lady snorted. "That was the price placed on it when I last had it appraised. Any bibliopole would pay

me that for it. But as I keep telling you, the bibliophile who owns the rest of the set would consider it absolutely priceless. For years I have been trying to track down that individual so I could purchase the two *Alices* from him at any price. My hope was that he or she might be in straitened circumstances and thus would not be able to refuse my offer. If he did refuse, I then planned to give him my volume so that at least, and at long last, the set would be complete. Of course, there may be *two* persons, each one possessing an *Alice*, but old records show that when the set was broken at an auction at the turn of the century one individual bought the two *Alices*, and another, *Rhyme? and Reason?* My dear, kind husband, who as you know was a famous bibliophile, as well as a noted bibliopegist, picked up the latter in a secondhand store in downtown New York, and it was his lifelong ambition. . . .”

Mrs. Arnold rambled on and on using all sorts of words with *biblio* prefixes until Ginny's head swam. She knew that a bibliopole was a rare-book dealer and that a bibliophile was a book-lover and that bibliopegy was the art of bookbinding, but the other words were unfamiliar. One thing was clear: The Lewis Carroll set with distinctive blue leather bindings was a subject that was of vital

importance to Mrs. Arnold. And *that* meant that nothing would induce her to drop it until *Rhyme? and Reason?* was found.

"In conclusion," the old lady boomed, "I want to make it quite clear that there is not a doubt in my mind. That book was stolen. Now, will you kindly answer my simple question: Whom do you suspect?"

Ginny sighed. "I'm afraid, Mrs. Arnold, that this time we're not involved in a mystery. Nobody could have or would have stolen the book. And we'll get it back for you even if it means hiring a bulldozer."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Arnold shouted. "That book is *not* at the dump. And I have suddenly remembered that there *is* a stranger in town. I can't imagine why you don't suspect him. That artist who is staying at the Inn until Joe Dakor finishes converting his old family home into apartments. Camden, I think you said his name was. And a very odd person, I must say. I remember distinctly that he tried desperately to rent the Stall before you young people took over the sublease. Why on earth would an artist want such a dark little hole-in-the-wall?"

"Because," Ginny broke in, "there wasn't any other place for him to live. You know, Mrs. Arnold, that there just

aren't any apartments in town. Carson and Betty couldn't have been married if you hadn't given them the gardener's cottage. And there are lots of engaged couples, like Lila and Joe, who—"

"Pooh," the frail old woman interrupted. "I'm not talking about young couples. I'm talking about an artist—a most eccentric young man if I may say so. He has a lovely room at the Inn. Why did he prefer your cubbyhole?"

Ginny shook her head. "It's just that he wants a place of his own. And, Mrs. Arnold, he's not the kind of artist who needs a skylight and a big studio. He came to Harristown just so he could paint Westchester landscapes—autumn leaves and all that sort of thing. *I* don't think he's so very eccentric. We all like him a lot. Besides, he didn't come to the sale yesterday."

Mrs. Arnold peered at Ginny through her lorgnette. "And he did not come to Harristown for the purpose of painting landscapes. I am convinced that he came here for the sole purpose of stealing my Lewis Carroll."

"Oh, Mrs. Arnold," Ginny begged. "That's not true. Mr. Camden isn't the least bit interested in old books. The only ones he ever borrows from us are detective stories which he reads at night because he says he can't sleep in

public places like that Inn. They're so noisy."

"Ridiculous!" Mrs. Arnold sniffed. "The Inn is famous for its peaceful, quiet atmosphere. You know as well as I do that it is always packed and jammed with New Yorkers who spend their vacations and week ends there simply because of the atmosphere. And yet Mrs. Dakor tells me that Mr. Camden plans to move into the ground floor of her home as soon as the paint is dry."

"That's right," Ginny agreed mildly. "And the minute the second floor apartment is ready, Joe and Lila are going to get married and move into it."

"That makes sense," Mrs. Arnold declared. "I am giving them their wedding. They will be married right here in this parlor the Saturday after Thanksgiving. But can you explain why an artist who is supposedly here to paint fall landscapes should decide at this late date to set up house-keeping in one of the Dakor apartments? Surely he will want to move back to the City when the trees are bare, which they will be shortly."

Ginny shook her head again. "He's not moving back, Mrs. Arnold. He's fallen in love with Harristown. And that proves he's not eccentric because Harristown is just about the most perfect place in the whole wide world."

"I agree." Mrs. Arnold glared. "But bibliophiles are notoriously appreciative of beauty. Mind you, I am not saying that your Mr. Camden is a common thief. What I am saying is this: He is the individual whom my husband and I sought for years. He owns the two *Alices*. Instead of my tracking him down, he has tracked *me* down!"

Ginny's mouth fell open with surprise. That *did* make sense! And Mr. Camden did come into the Stall on Saturday to borrow a whodunit. In the confusion caused by preparations for the sale, he could easily have slipped "R and R" into his pocket without being seen. Ginny's mind raced. Nobody really and truly knew for sure that Mr. Camden was *the* Theodore Camden, a famous magazine illustrator. Maybe he was an impostor. Maybe he *had* come to Harristown last month to steal Mrs. Arnold's book in order to complete his valuable Lewis Carroll set. When he arrived he must have found out right away that she was so very rich she would never be forced into selling it to him. So—had he stayed on, posing as an artist, hoping for a chance to steal it?

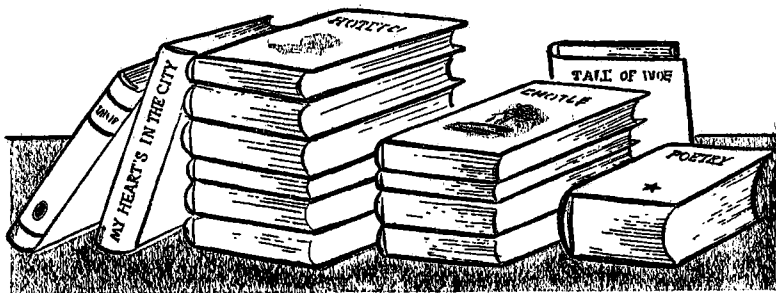
As though she had been reading Ginny's mind, Mrs. Arnold said, "That's it, exactly. Now, you and I must put our heads together, Ginny, and solve this mystery. The

first step is for you to gather some clues. If I were not so old and decrepit I would search his room at the Inn myself . . . with, of course, the full permission of the proprietor, that nice Mr. Crayne. That you must do immediately."

Ginny came to her senses then. Solving another mystery and capturing a criminal meant *boarding school*! Furthermore, even attempting to solve this mystery would be so time-consuming that she would have to give up all idea of being a radio emcee. And, last but not least, deep down in her heart, Ginny knew that Mr. Camden was not an impostor.

She stood up and said politely but firmly, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Arnold, but I can't help you solve this mystery because I honestly don't think there is one."

The old lady's blue-veined eyelids shot up with surprise and anger. "Very well, Virginia," she snapped, "I hereby withdraw my patronage of the Stall. With, I might add, all that that implies!"



7 • A NEW FRIEND

Ginny biked away from the mansion feeling, as she told Lucy later, “as low as a snake.” Mrs. Arnold’s withdrawal of her patronage could only mean one thing: The Hustlers must pay back right away the three hundred dollars she had invested in the Stall. And, morally, they should pay her another five hundred dollars or produce the valuable Lewis Carroll book.

Ginny was so hot and tired and cross when she arrived at the Stall that for once in her life she was speechless. Nobody was there but Lucy who greeted her excitedly:

“Guess what? We’ve got another thirty dollars! Mr. Adrian bought the Thackeray set and Mr. Camden bought the Dickens set. They both wanted to pay me more for them on account of the illustrations are rare or something, but I stuck to what John said, fifteen dollars per set.”

"Don't mention John Blaketon's name to me," Ginny begged. "And I'm in no mood to get excited about thirty dollars, especially when it doesn't belong to us and we owe ten times that much to Mrs. Arnold."

Lucy stared at her sympathetically. "No luck, huh?"

Ginny related the whole scene in detail, ending with: "We wouldn't have any worries at all if I could afford to play detective with the sweet old lady. But I just don't dare. Even if Mr. Camden were a thief, which he isn't, I'd end up in some sort of a scrape which would get Aunt Betsy going on the ladies' seminary angle."

Lucy nodded. "Of course Mr. Camden isn't a thief. And he isn't one of those *biblio*-people either. Actually he seems to prefer the paperback whodunits to the others. He was crazy about the Dickens set, of course, but only because somebody named Boz or Phiz illustrated them."

"Phiz," Ginny said wearily. "Boz was a pen name Dickens used occasionally and Phiz was the pseudonym of his most famous illustrator, H. K. Browne. As a matter of fact, he illustrated the *Waverley Novels* Mrs. Arnold gave us, too. If Mr. Camden is so crazy about Phiz illustrations, he'd probably buy that set, too." She picked up *Kenilworth* and pointed to the frontispiece. "Why don't you

take this over to the Inn and show it to him right now? Tell him we have the complete Abbotsford edition. If he buys the set it will mean the end of one of our headaches. So far as I can see, there isn't another secondhand book for sale around here, is there?"

Lucy tucked the *Waverly Novel* under her arm. "That's why everybody has disappeared. Babs is collecting overdue rentals, a chore she adores because she spends the money she collects on candy, although I must admit she does pay us back when she gets her allowance."

Ginny frowned. "Where are the boys—I mean, where is Whiz?"

"They, *John* and Whiz," Lucy said pointedly, "are out at the dump. Carson has the afternoon off and he picked them up in his Ford about twenty minutes ago. They've decided to unearth that carton if it kills them. I frankly think they're wasting their time. I agree with Mrs. Arnold. The book was stolen, but not by Mr. Camden. And," she finished from the doorway, "you'd think so, too, if you weren't so scared of getting involved in another mystery."

She left Ginny feeling very cross. Usually *she* was the one who suspected a mystery and was kidded to death by the others. Now the tables were turned and it was a mad-

dening situation for a former sleuth to be in.

The 4:04 express train from New York roared into the station then and Ginny perked up. She had better forget her worries and concentrate on the lending library business because some early commuters might come into the Stall to borrow or return books. If she fouled up the card system John would be in a position to criticize her and accuse her of having bitten off more than she could chew. Thinking along those lines brought Ginny around in a full circle to her emcee job and she was forced to face the fact that so far she had accomplished nothing.

“Hello!”

Ginny jumped and faced the doorway. Standing there, half in and half out, was one of the prettiest young women she had ever seen. She was not much taller than Lucy, with short curly blond hair and round blue eyes with dark lashes, and although she had only spoken one word Ginny was impressed by the musical lilt in her voice.

“Hello,” the young lady said again, coming all the way into the Stall. “I’m Alicia Golden and I just got off the train from New York. There seems to be an awful dearth of taxis around here and no porters at all. I’ve got two trunk-size suitcases in the station and—” she waved her

lovely hands expressively “—I can’t budge them.”

GINNY smiled, thinking: “Alicia Golden looks exactly the way Lucy is going to look when she’s slim and twenty!” Aloud she said, “I imagine you’re going to stay at the Inn, Miss Golden. Only a few taxis meet this train because the regular Commuters’ Train arrives at five-oh-five. But I’ll run around the corner to the candy store and call Mr. Crayne. He’s the manager of the Inn, you know, and he’ll send someone for you right away.”

“Well, thanks.” Alicia Golden sank into the chair Ginny had vacated. “But don’t rush off. I’m interested in your Stall. It’s a teen-age project, I gather?”

“That’s right,” Ginny said and explained all about the Hustlers and their portable lending library. In conclusion she said, “We’ve just had a sale of secondhand books to raise money for the high school library fund. It was awfully successful. All we have left is that Abbotsford edition of the *Waverley Novels*.”

“Classics.” Alicia Golden unbuttoned the jacket of her smartly cut suit. “I don’t suppose you sold any modern books at your sale?”

“Oh, yes,” Ginny corrected her. “A lot of people donated practically brand-new copies of current best-sellers. One



of them was *My Heart's in the City*, a novel which everyone hates but at the same time is crazy about." She grinned. "I'm ashamed to say that I haven't read it myself. Have you, Miss Golden?"

To Ginny's amazement, the pretty young lady, instead of replying, went off into gales of laughter. "Yes, I have read it," she sort of gurgled, running her slim fingers through her short blond curls. "And please don't call me Miss Golden. It makes me feel as ancient as a mummy. My name is Alicia. What's yours?"

"Ginny. Ginny Gordon," Ginny replied. "I'm the business manager of the Stall and John Blaketon is the president, never mind. I'm sure you're not interested in all of that kind of thing. Shall I—"

"But I *am* interested in all that kind of thing," Alicia broke in. "I'm only a few years older than you, Ginny, but when I was your age teen-agers weren't allowed to do exciting things like this. I lived in a small town, too, but whenever I had a bright idea it was frowned upon by the elders." She pounded the desk with her small fists. "In fact, I was practically labeled as a juvenile delinquent simply because I—oh, well, never mind. The net result was that I went away to boarding school and then to college and I

guess my parents were right. If I hadn't gone away all of my bright ideas would have been stifled before they were born. Now that I live in Greenwich Village in New York City I can do and say exactly what I please without fear of criticism. And nobody, *but nobody*, can boss me around."

"Yes'm." Ginny was completely fascinated by this pretty young woman who looked as dainty and helpless as a spring flower but whose verve and independence of spirit were portrayed in her voice. One minute it reminded Ginny of a babbling brook and the next, a thundering waterfall. But it was always beautiful, rich, and exciting.

"Don't ma'am me," Alicia was declaiming dramatically. "If you call me anything but Alicia I'll never speak to you again. I'm terribly interested in your library and while I'm here I want you to call on me for advice whenever you feel the need of it. But only if we're going to be friends. First-name friends." She held out one slim hand, chuckling. "Let's shake on it, Ginny, although you can't possibly know now that my advice would have some value."

They shook hands and Ginny said, "Since you're a college graduate I'm sure your advice would be good . . . *Alicia*. Right now the library is running smoothly. So smoothly, in fact, that I've taken on another job." In a rush of words

she then told her new friend all about the teen-age radio program which she was to emcee. Before she had quite finished, Alicia jumped up, trilling:

"It's out of this world, positively out of this world. I've never heard of anything quite so wonderful." She stopped suddenly and demanded, "Do you mean to stand there, Ginny Gordon, and tell me that the old folks in this town actually approve of it? Your parents and the high school librarian? It's just not possible."

"Oh, but it is," Ginny protested. "The people in Harris-town are always interested in teen-age projects. Of course there are some very old residents like my own Great-Aunt Betsy who think all girls of my age should be buried alive in tombs like boarding schools—"

Alicia's gay laugh cut off the rest of Ginny's sentence. "Boarding schools nowadays aren't tombs, honey. I had a grand time when I went but, of course, anything would have seemed wonderful to me after—" Her lovely voice dwindled away and she suddenly snatched a book from the rental shelf. "Oh, I'm so glad you have *Blue Moonbeams*. Putnam is one of my favorite authors. May I join your library right now, Ginny, and borrow this novel?"

"Oh, of course," Ginny replied enthusiastically. "Mr.

Putnam is one of my favorites, too. As a matter of fact, I've decided to make his book the topic for our first broadcast and invite him to be our guest author. That is, of course, if the boys and girls on the panel like the book as much as I do."

Alicia nodded. "They'll be wild about it. According to the reviews it's an all-ager, practically a classic. The heroine, I gather, is sort of a cross between Becky Sharp and Jane Austen's Emma. I can't imagine a more intriguing combination of characteristics." She nursed the book thoughtfully for a moment. "Characters are the most important part of a novel—that's for sure. The locale isn't anywhere near as important. A lot of novices in the writing field make the mistake of thinking that it is. What I mean is, a writer's first novel is apt to be pretty autobiographical. He naturally paints a scene he is familiar with—his childhood background, usually." She frowned. "But that's a mistake, I'm beginning to believe. Not that an author should write about something with which he is totally unfamiliar; that's even a worse mistake. But any way you look at it, the locale is of secondary importance. Yes, you're quite right, Ginny, the characters are what make or break the book. I agree with you thoroughly."

This remark sounded so much like Mrs. Arnold that Ginny couldn't help laughing. Mrs. Arnold was forever correcting or agreeing with statements which Ginny had never made!

"Furthermore," Alicia continued, just as though Ginny were a million miles away—another Mrs. Arnold-ism, "I detest autobiographies. Nobody wants to hear about somebody's unhappy childhood experiences. Of course, *David Copperfield* is something else again. Charles Dickens had an unhappy but very *exciting* childhood. And anyway, who in this modern world could aspire to being another Dickens? Besides, his characters were really more like caricatures. Uriah Heep and Micawber, for instance." She rambled on and on, behaving, Ginny thought, more like Mrs. Arnold every minute.

Those two must meet sometime, Ginny decided. *It would be love at first sight*. Before she knew it, Ginny found herself telling her new friend all about *Rhyme? and Reason?* and how Whiz had accidentally toted it away to the dump.

"That's where it is, of course," Ginny finished, "but I can never convince Mrs. Arnold of that. As Carson keeps saying, suspense is the breath of life to her!"

Alicia went off into another gale of laughter. "I must

meet your darling Mrs. Arnold soon. She sounds like a caricature of a caricature. When I was your age there wasn't anybody like that in my home town. Does she really enjoy poking her fingers into teen-age pies?"

"She dotes on it," Ginny replied emphatically. "And usually she's a lot of fun to work with. But when she makes up her mind to something, there's no changing her, and that's why I want so much to pay back what we borrowed when we first started in business. Any day she may decide that the Stall should be a sort of day nursery and that we shouldn't carry anything but picture books. Or she might decide that we should stock nothing but reference books which would be way over the head of the average Harris-town resident."

Alicia narrowed her eyes. "So you think that the average resident is not very bright?"

"I don't mean that at all," Ginny said quickly. "Even grownups who couldn't afford to go to college after they finished high school are very well-educated—self-educated, you might say. Joe Dakor, for instance, is practically a genius and he had to leave college when his father died in his freshman year. He runs the Swap Shop which we Hustlers started, you know. And our hermit, who's so

eccentric that you'd probably call him a caricature of a caricature, is a Ph.D. When John's father was in college Dr. Forrester, the hermit, was his philosophy professor. And—"

"Whoa!" Alicia shouted. "I don't believe a word of it, Ginny. You make Harristown sound like a paradise. And to think that I picked it out by simply closing my eyes and putting my finger on a map of Westchester!"

Ginny stared at her. "Why, it *is* sort of a paradise. I thought you were probably spending your vacation at the Inn because it's so famous for its food and atmosphere. And when I was talking about reference books, what I meant was that we couldn't compete with our public library which is well stocked with them. And the library also has a story-telling hour every morning for preschool kids, so—"

"Never mind," Alicia broke in, grinning. "I'll take your word for it: Harristown is Utopia. And the Inn is perfect. But what is the White Elephant room that Mr. Crayne says I must live in?"

It was Ginny's turn to laugh. "The White Elephant is a little room on the second floor of the Inn which Mr. Crayne only rents in emergencies because it's so small."

"Not exactly Utopia," Alicia said with a chuckle. "But

any port in a storm. When I called for a reservation this morning Mr. Crayne informed me that I would have to stay in his White Elephant for a few days. I understand there's an artist who has a lovely room and who's going to depart soon."

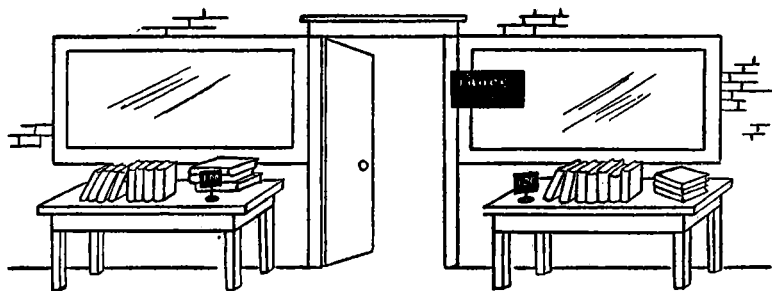
Ginny nodded. "Mr. Camden is going to move into the ground floor apartment of the old Dakor house as soon as it's ready. The Dakor house used to be a real white elephant, and when Mrs. Dakor went to live with Mrs. Arnold as her companion Joe started converting it into an apartment house. He and our maid, Lila, are going to get married soon. She'll be the business manager of the Swap Shop which will give Joe more time for working on his beloved antiques."

Alicia shook her head incredulously. "Antiques in a swap shop! Rare books at the dump! This town gets more fascinating by the minute." She took a dollar and a quarter from her purse. "This makes me a member in good standing, doesn't it? And you'd better not leave the Stall in case someone else comes in. Just tell me how to get to that candy store, Ginny. I'll telephone Mr. Crayne myself."

Ginny stood in the doorway of the Stall until Alicia's cab had disappeared from view. She liked her new friend

tremendously even though she had known her only a short while. But there was something mysterious about her. She had obviously been in a hurry when she decided to take a vacation, but why on earth had she picked out a place by "simply closing my eyes and putting my finger on a map of Westchester"? And why should such a gay, pretty young lady want to spend her vacation in a quiet place like the Inn? Although Alicia was certainly very intelligent and a book-lover, she struck Ginny as the type who would spend her holidays on a Caribbean cruise instead of in a small-town hotel. An aura of music, laughter, and bright colors seemed to hang over Alicia, and yet every now and then bitterness had crept into her lilting voice and unhappiness had clouded her blue eyes.

"She's a mystery all right," Ginny muttered and then quickly corrected herself. "No, she isn't. She's an enigma, that's all. And probably a very simple enigma at that!"



8 • LADY INCOGNITO

Alicia Golden returned *Blue Moonbeams* the following afternoon when Ginny was again alone in the Stall. In spite of loud protests from the girls, the boys had decided to spend all of their spare time working at the dump with Carson whenever he was free.

"I am absolutely positive," Babs informed Ginny at lunch that day, "that neither Whiz nor I could have been so dumb as to dump that book into the carton with those old primers. And I am also positive that Mrs. Arnold is right. Mr. Camden swiped it. I always said he was crazy."

"Oh, Babs," Ginny had wailed, "you think everybody is crazy who is the slightest bit different. You're always saying the hermit is crazy when you know perfectly well that Dr. Forrester is a very brilliant man."

"Pooh." Babs tossed her pigtails. "He's absolutely nuts."

Nobody in his right mind would let his hair and beard grow, and live in that queer, patched-up cottage."

There was no sense in arguing with Babs, so Ginny had turned away and had spent the rest of the lunch hour trying to find a boy or a girl who would be on her panel.

"No luck," she told Alicia that afternoon. "I can't understand it. You'd think they'd be wild about the idea."

"Not necessarily," Alicia replied. "If the first broadcast is a success then you'll find yourself swamped with requests. But nobody likes to take part in an experiment. The very fact that you are running the whole thing would make some kids shy off. I don't mean you, personally, Ginny. I'm sure you'll make a great success of it, but your contemporaries may have doubts. After all, you've had absolutely no experience." She laid *Moonbeams* on the desk. "By the way, have you got in touch with Mr. Putnam yet?"

Ginny shook her head. "I can't do anything about an author until my panel is formed. They might decide on another book."

Alicia frowned. "Famous authors are very busy people. They like publicity of any kind, of course, because it helps sell their books, but they are constantly receiving requests to appear on radio and TV, and to give lectures. You'd

better decide on an author right away and make sure that he—or she—will be free the Friday evening after Thanksgiving.”

“I know,” Ginny said, “but there isn’t anything I can do until I get my panel. If only John—” She bit her lip.

“John?” Alicia Golden smiled mischievously. “That boy’s name keeps cropping up in your conversation, Ginny. I seem to have got the impression that you and the president of the Hustlers are not on good terms at the moment. Would you like to weep on my shoulder about it, or is it none of my business?”

Ginny’s cheeks flamed. “There’s nothing to weep about. I’ve known John all of my life and just because he’s a year older than I am he thinks he can boss me all over the place. It finally got on my nerves and I told him so!”

“I know just how you feel!” Alicia’s own cheeks were very pink. “If you’re the least bit fond of a man and let him know that you are, he gets unbearably bossy. I think you were *so* right to tell John off! I imagine he’s one of those hot-tempered redheads who think that a girl can’t cross the street without a male escort.”

Ginny couldn’t help laughing. “John’s not like that at all. He’s got black, wavy hair and he never loses his temper

unless he's goaded into it. The thing about him that makes *me* furious is that when he dishes out advice, he's always right. It gets boring, so when he told me I shouldn't take on the emcee job I made up my mind that I would, just to prove that sometimes he can be wrong."

Alicia's blue eyes flashed. "Good! Great! Now you've just *got* to make a success of it, Ginny. Make your John crawl back to you on his hands and knees begging forgiveness. That's the way *I* feel about bossy men."

Just then Mr. Camden came into the Stall. He glanced at Alicia and said, "Why, hello, Miss—er-ah— Good heavens, I must be slipping! I've forgotten your name." The young artist turned to Ginny: "It's the atmosphere of the Inn. It makes one dopey. How could I have forgotten the name of such a beautiful young lady?"

Alicia glared at him. "You've made a mistake, sir. I never saw you before in my life." Her golden head held high, she swept out.

Chuckling, Mr. Camden stared after her. "She's somebody famous and I met her at an artists' and authors' shindig this fall somewhere; I'll swear to it. What's her name, Ginny?"

"Golden," Ginny told him. "Alicia Golden."

He shook his head. "It suits her perfectly, but it doesn't ring a bell. Is she staying at the Inn?"

"That's right," Ginny said. "Do you really think she's a famous artist here incognito?"

"She can't be much older than you, Ginny," he replied, "so she can't be so very famous. Maybe I was mistaken. She looks like a lot of pretty gals you see on mag covers. Anyway, I came in to buy the rest of your *Waverley Novels*. Boy, am I thrilled to get two complete sets containing Phiz illustrations! I've got some of his original sketches in my studio, you know."

Ginny's hands trembled as she took the check from him and made a notation on the Day Sheet. The quaint old illustrations in "R and R" were probably by somebody as famous as Phiz. Maybe Mrs. Arnold was right—maybe Mr. Camden—

His voice broke into her thoughts: "Is Lucy having a nervous breakdown? I'm not so old that I can't remember that at this time of the year you get your first-quarter report cards. Is Lucy worried about her marks?"

"I don't think so," Ginny said slowly. "Why do you ask?"

He shrugged. "Well, when she brought *Kenilworth* over to the Inn yesterday afternoon, she came right up to

my room with it instead of first announcing herself at the desk. I'm not an Aunt Betsy when it comes to being a stickler about conventions, Ginny. You know that. But I couldn't help thinking it was odd. I happened to be out at the time, and when I came back, there she was sitting primly on the edge of the sofa in the alcove. The room I have is one of those combination bedroom and sitting rooms, you know—practically a suite. But I got the distinct impression that she had been searching it."

Oh, dear, Ginny moaned inwardly. Babs isn't the only one who suspects that Mr. Camden swiped "R and R." In spite of what she said yesterday, Lucy must suspect him, too! Aloud she said, "While she was waiting for you, Lucy probably did roam around and look at your paintings. Everyone in town is very curious about your work, Mr. Camden. You really ought to have an exhibition of your landscapes."

He shrugged. "I'm not being modest, but honestly, I haven't produced anything worth exhibiting, and I won't until I get a place of my own. Thank goodness, Joe says my apartment will be ready on Monday." He borrowed one of the latest mysteries and departed.

Lucy arrived soon afterward, and when Ginny accused



her of searching Mr. Camden's room at the Inn she said defiantly, "Yes, I did. I just wanted to make sure that Babs and Mrs. Arnold are wrong. And I just sort of glanced around at things. What was wrong with that?"

"Nothing," Ginny replied, "except that you should have waited for him in the lobby. And you obviously acted peculiarly because he said you did. Which reminds me. We get our first-quarter report cards on the Friday before the Thanksgiving holidays. Just a week from this coming Friday. That means tests all next week. Oh, woe! When will I find time to study for them?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Lucy said unsympathetically.

Ginny knew she was still cross with her so she said quickly, "Please don't think I was criticizing you, Lucy. I know you and Babs think someone stole 'R and R,' and maybe somebody did. But let's not do any sleuthing until we're sure it's not in the carton at the dump."

Lucy smiled. "All right. And I was silly yesterday. If Mr. Camden had stolen the book he wouldn't have left it around in plain view. I guess I got sort of carried away by Babs. She's so sure that he's the thief that—well, anyway, he's the only stranger in town and he *did* come into the Stall on Saturday when there was so much confusion and

he *does* collect old books! You know that, Ginny."

Ginny giggled. "I sort of suspect him myself, but he's not the only stranger in town any more. In fact, he never was. There are always a lot of out-of-town people at the Inn. I didn't notice any of them at the sale on Monday, but one of them could have slipped in." She told Lucy then about her new friend. "I don't think Alicia Golden is her real name," she finished. "I think Mr. Camden is right, she's somebody famous and is here incognito. She as good as said she was a career woman, and I remember now that when the taxi driver brought her luggage from the waiting room he had a typewriter under one arm."

"How exciting!" Lucy cried. "I can't wait to meet her. If she's as gorgeous as you say, she's probably a famous fashion designer. That's what I'm going to be."

Ginny nodded. "And she looks enough like you to be your older sister. Another thing about her which intrigues me is that she has obviously been disappointed in love."

"That makes you two twins," Lucy teased. "Oh, please make up with John, Ginny. You know perfectly well that you can't swing that emcee job without his help. I heard some of the boys talking in the cafeteria today. Chuck Warner was one of them. They all said they wouldn't be

caught dead on a program that was being run by a girl. And I honestly think that some of the girls feel the same way. The older ones, anyway—”

“Well,” Ginny interrupted, “I wouldn’t be caught dead on a program with John Blaketon as co-emcee. And I’ll get together a good panel soon. The trouble is that there just isn’t enough time during lunch to talk about it all and make it sound like fun. And in the evening after supper everybody is busy with homework. I think I’ll leave here early this afternoon and see some of the kids on my list.”

“Oh, you can’t do that,” Lucy protested. “Wednesday is always our busiest day.”

“Saturday then—” Ginny began, but Lucy broke in with:

“That’s one of our busiest days, too. And Sunday is out because you know yourself, Ginny, that people don’t like to have callers on Sundays. And all next week there’ll be tests so you’ll have to spend every spare minute studying.” She shook her head. “No, you’ll just have to make up with John.”

“Never,” Ginny said determinedly. Unconsciously she used Alicia’s words as she added, “If John wants to make up he’ll have to crawl back to me on his hands and knees.”

Lucy looked shocked. “John just isn’t the humble type

and you know it, Ginny. And he certainly isn't going to apologize when it's already been proven that he was right and you were wrong. You may as well admit it, Ginny. You did bite off more than you could chew!"



9 • EMERGENCY MEETING!

But Ginny wouldn't admit it. She was in no mood to face unpleasant facts—until finally on Sunday evening she was forced to face several of them at once. In the first place, with the broadcast less than two weeks away, she had signed up only one girl who had promised to serve on the panel. Another girl and a boy, both junior-high students, had given half-promises.

"If we don't have to do anything next week during the report-card tests," they had said firmly.

All three of them had agreed that *Blue Moonbeams* would be a good book although none of them had read it. The rental copy was so much in demand that it never stayed in the Stall more than a few minutes. So on Friday after school Ginny biked to Broadcast House which was on the outskirts of town and consulted Mr. Adrian.

"Write to the publishers right away," he advised her, "and ask them to send you four review copies. They won't charge you for them. At the same time ask the publishers to send you Mr. Putnam's address so you can contact him right away." He frowned thoughtfully. "*Moonbeams* is an excellent choice but Wilcox Putnam is so very, very famous I'm beginning to wonder if it isn't already too late. Perhaps it would be wise to pick a less noted author—someone who needs publicity so much that he would snap at the chance of appearing on your program."

"Oh, I hate to do that," Ginny wailed. "If the program is going to be a success we really ought to have as our guest somebody very, very famous."

Mr. Adrian nodded. "True, but—" He stood up and walked to the door of his office with Ginny. "Well, you go ahead and cope the best you can."

When Ginny arrived at the Stall she found Lucy and Babs waiting for her out on the sidewalk.

"A fine thing," Babs said crossly. "Great! We've been standing here in this hot sun for hours. Why weren't you here to unlock the door? Are we supposed to break the windows in order to get inside and carry on business? Are you the business manager or aren't you?"

"Oh, dear," Ginny said apologetically. "John has keys—I just took it for granted that he'd open up shop."

Lucy, Ginny could see, was almost as mad as Babs. "You ought to stop taking things like that for granted," said Lucy. "If you don't know that John is working out at the dump, you ought to. Where were you, anyway?"

Ginny unlocked the door and the windows which covered the sidewalk display. "I biked out to Broadcast House to talk to Mr. Adrian. And I've got to write a letter to a publisher right away. Will you take my place here, Lucy, while I go home for my portable typewriter?"

"I certainly will not," Lucy said, still angry. "I promised a lot of our members that I'd bring them books today so they could read them over the week end."

"Me, too," said Babs, gathering up some popular novels. "You know very well that Friday is our busiest day, Ginny,—that is, if we really are a portable lending library. We've already wasted so much time waiting for you, I won't be able to deliver half of the books I promised."

Ginny bent her head over the card files and worked furiously with her pencil and date stamp. She was thoroughly ashamed of herself and knew that she deserved every angry word the girls had spoken. But it was much

easier to blame it all on John. After Babs left she said to Lucy:

"John makes me furious. Why must he waste so much time out at the dump?"

"Because," Lucy said evenly, "'R and R' represents five hundred dollars to us. I suppose little items like that are beneath your notice now that you're *almost* a high-and-mighty emcee." She scooped up her books and departed.

Later Ginny realized that she should have faced one unpleasant fact then and there: She couldn't be business manager of the Stall and emcee of a radio program at the same time. But she didn't face it, and neither did she write a letter to the publishers of *Moonbeams* that day. Nor did she find time on Saturday to write it, although she brought her portable to the Stall for that very purpose. And so, of course, that's where her typewriter was when she got home around nine o'clock on Saturday evening.

"I just can't go back and get it now," Ginny decided wearily. "I'm too tired to think anyway. I'll go to the Stall early tomorrow morning, write the letter, and take it to the post office myself so it'll be sure to go off sometime on Sunday. Even if I did write it and mail it tonight, it wouldn't leave town any sooner."

But Ginny had forgotten something important. Lila, busy with plans for her wedding, was not working full-time for the Gordons any more. This meant that Ginny had more household tasks than ever, especially during week ends which Lila spent in her own home or at the Arnold estate.

It was noon when Ginny finished washing the breakfast dishes and tidying the downstairs rooms. Then there were beds to be made and she was busy with that chore when the phone rang. It was Lucy.

"Have you heard the news?"

"No," Ginny replied without much interest. Lucy very often got excited about some trivial event.

"You don't sound very interested," Lucy retorted.

Oh, dear, Ginny reflected ruefully, *I must pull myself together. Practically everybody, including my best friend, is mad at me!* Aloud she said, forcing warmth into her voice, "What happened? Have the boys found 'R and R'?"

"No," Lucy told her, "and that's the point. John has called an emergency meeting of the club at my house in ten minutes. Don't be late." She hung up.

Now Ginny was so consumed with curiosity that she made the beds hurriedly and raced out of the house. Some-

thing awful must have happened to make him call a meeting of the Hustlers on a Sunday when he and the twins were usually getting ready to go to their grandmother's for a big dinner. It was such a warm, muggy day that Ginny decided not to ride her bike; instead she hurried along the short cut through the park. Her chestnut curls were damp with perspiration when she arrived at Lucy's home and found the others waiting for her on the front lawn.

"The meeting will now come to order," John said as soon as she collapsed in a deck chair. "Whiz, Carson, and I finally unearthed the carton about an hour ago. *Rhyme? and Reason?* wasn't there."

"I never did think it was," Lucy and Babs said in unison.

"It *had* to be there," Ginny began. "Where else—?"

"The president still has the floor," John said sternly. "I'll ask for comments later. Right now we have to face the fact that somebody stole the book either while it was in the Stall, or last week end when it was at the dump. If the latter is true, the verb *stole* does not apply since anything deposited on the dump is public property." He nodded at Whiz. "The president recognizes Mr. Reilly."

Whiz stood up. "I respectfully submit, Mr. President, that the book never was deposited on the dump. I

examined the carton carefully when we unearthed it and I am willing to swear that the contents had not been touched since I displayed them to the junk dealer. I distinctly remember the titles of the books on top. They were still on top when we opened the carton this morning.”

“In my opinion,” John said, “that settles it. The book was taken from the Stall during the time that elapsed between last Saturday morning, November fourth to be exact, and Monday afternoon when the business manager discovered it was missing. Unless, of course, the business manager happened to notice the book on the special shelf when she and I were working in the Stall last Sunday. Would the business manager like to make any comment at this time?”

Ginny’s lips twitched and she understood now why John had called a meeting instead of just a simple gathering of the gang. This way he could address remarks to her without actually speaking to her. It was comforting to know that even though he was mad at her he was still interested in hearing her comments on the situation. But she didn’t look at him as she said:

“I can’t swear that the book was in the Stall at any time after I put it on the special shelf last Saturday. I can’t even

swear that I did put it on the special shelf then, but I am almost positive that I did."

Without looking at her, John said, "My recollection is that you did."

"And," Ginny continued, "it is ridiculous for us to think that someone may have broken into the Stall after that and stolen it. There was absolutely no evidence of burglary when the president and I were there on Sunday and when we opened the door and the windows before the sale on Monday. Therefore, the book must have been taken during the confusion on Saturday when we were getting ready for the sale, or on Monday during the first hectic hours of the sale. I have been trying to remember who came in on Saturday to borrow and return books and I have also checked the cards which show what was borrowed and returned on that day. The records agree with my recollection: Ten members came in and, with the exception of Mr. Camden, we've known every one of them all of our lives. They were all people who wouldn't steal a rusty pin from anybody. I include Mr. Camden in that category. Successful magazine illustrators, even if they do go around in sloppy clothes, have plenty of money. If he had craved *Rhyme? and Reason?* he would have bought it from us." She stopped

to catch her breath and continued: "Of course, I can't remember everybody who came to the sale on Monday but if a stranger had come inside I am sure I would have noticed him. So this is what must have happened: One of our friends must have picked up the book and taken it outside where the light was better to browse through it. Then he or she must have put it down on one of the display tables. After that, it's anybody's guess as to what happened." She sat down.

"Well, I like that!" Babs exploded. "You're just trying to shift the blame to one of us who worked outside. But I seem to remember that there was a hard and fast rule made by you yourself that you, and you alone, would be responsible for the books on the special shelf. So—"

"You have not been recognized, Miss Reilly," John broke in. "The business manager has already assumed full blame for the loss of the book, but of course the club as a whole is responsible. I have called this meeting for the purpose of recognizing the fact that we must somehow raise five hundred dollars as soon as possible. If we don't pay Mrs. Arnold right away, Carson will. And that just can't happen. Therefore, I suggest that we hold another sale immediately and sell our stock. The books are still in excellent condition

so we should be able to raise two or three hundred dollars that way. We can then make a down payment on our debt and arrange to cancel the rest of the debt in installments."

"Oh, John," Ginny wailed, forgetting that she wasn't speaking to him, "we can't do that. We already owe her the three hundred dollars she originally invested in the Stall. And what about the members who have paid a dollar to join our library? If we go out of business so soon after starting we'll have to refund their membership fees."

John gave her a cold glance and said, "The chair recognizes Miss Tryon."

Lucy stood up, her cheeks pink with embarrassment. "Since Ginny is so sure that somebody bought the book when it was accidentally out on one of the display tables, why don't we run a notice in the personal column of the *News* offering a reward for the return of it? Ginny is positive that whoever bought it is one of our best friends so—"

"Mr. Chairman," Whiz broke in, "point of personal privilege. If Miss Tryon will yield the floor—"

"Okay." Lucy sat down, her cheeks redder than ever. Ginny knew that Lucy was not only mad at her but was convinced that the book had been stolen.

"In my opinion," Whiz was saying hotly, "the business

manager has insulted all of us. We have all repeatedly stated that we did not sell that book. Therefore *I* am positive that one of two things happened: Either she herself sold the book or it was stolen."

He sat down amid loud applause from Babs and Lucy. John silenced them, calling sternly for order. "The business manager has not accused anybody of anything," he pointed out. "If Miss Tryon will put her suggestion in the form of a motion and it is duly seconded, I will call for a vote. Miss Tryon still has the floor."

"Oh, John," Lucy wailed, pulling a lock of hair across her pretty face. "I don't understand parliamentary law. You make the motion, please."

"Point of order," Whiz broke in. "There is no sense in wasting time on a motion which won't even be seconded. I hereby make this motion: We here and now and henceforth are in full agreement that the book was stolen."

"I second the motion," said Babs.

"Very well," said John. "Are you ready for the question? We shall proceed on the premise that the book was stolen. All in favor say Aye."

"Aye," they all said at once.

"Oh, all right," Ginny said after a moment. "To make

it unanimous, I'll say Aye, too."

"Then the next step," said John, "is to face the fact that the book is gone forever. Even if our business manager were in a sleuthing mood, which she definitely isn't, and even if she were she wouldn't have time to play detective, even *she* would have to face the fact that there are no clues. So far as I can see there isn't even a suspect who could possibly have a motive."

"Oh, you and your *evens*," Ginny muttered. "If the chair will let me have the floor I'll try to make some sense."

John gave her another cold glance. "The chair recognizes Miss Gordon."

Ginny stood up. "Lucy and Babs suspect Mr. Camden and I'll go along with them to this point. He did have both motive and opportunity. But I flatly refuse to believe that he is a thief unless they produce some proof. So I make this motion: We will take no further steps until they have either produced proof that Mr. Camden stole it, or a frank admittance from them both that they were wrong."

"I second the motion," said Whiz, "on the condition that Ginny bikes out right now and tells Mrs. Arnold our decision. The very fact that we have accepted the fact that a mystery exists will make her happy, and as long as some of

us are sleuthing around, she'll stay happy."

"That's true," Ginny agreed. "And it will give us time to think up ways and means for raising the money we owe her. While I'm out there I'll try to make Carson and Betty understand that this is strictly our problem."

"Very well," said John. "The chair understands that the motion as amended has been seconded and has our unanimous approval. Unless I hear any objection the meeting will be adjourned. We stand in recess until Monday after school when the business manager will report the result of her conversation with Mrs. Arnold."

Ginny raced off for home. She was taking her bike out of the garage when her mother called to her from the back door. "Where are you going, dear?"

Ginny coasted down to the steps and her mother came out onto the stoop. "To Mrs. Arnold's," Ginny said. "I've got some important things to discuss with her."

"I'm afraid they'll have to wait," Mrs. Gordon said. "Your father and I have some important things to discuss with you."

Ginny's heart sank and she dropped her bike on the driveway. Her mother's tone of voice spelled Trouble with a capital T! "Oh, what have I done now?" she asked herself

as she slowly climbed the steps. "Or maybe it's what I *haven't* done."

It was then that Ginny began to face a few unpleasant facts. She had been neglecting her homework, and all last week she had not been able to concentrate in class. But her parents wouldn't know about that—not until the first-quarter report cards were handed out next Friday. Ginny had hoped to get high marks in the tests but now she realized that she would have very little time, if any, for studying. Why, keeping Mrs. Arnold happy was practically a full-time job in itself!

Another fact she faced was this: She hadn't really made the beds today; she had simply covered up the wrinkled linen and blankets with the spreads and hurried off. That was probably why she was going to get a scolding.

"Yes, that's it," Ginny decided, her spirits rising. "I'll say I'm sorry, which I am, and make the beds over again, and that will be that."

But she knew she was wrong the minute she entered the study and saw her father's face. *Scolding* was far too mild a word to describe what he was waiting to say to her.



10 • FACING FACTS

Never before in her life had Ginny seen her father look so stern. Weakly she sank down on the cretonne-covered sofa beside her mother.

"I'm sorry about the beds. John called an emergency meeting of our club and I just had to hurry. I'll—"

"I remade them," Mrs. Gordon said quietly. "But that's not what we want to talk to you about."

Mr. Gordon cleared his throat. "While you were gone Mr. Wales happened to pass by. I was raking leaves on the lawn and he stopped to say hello. He ended up by saying a lot more, Ginny."

Ginny's heart sank. Mr. Wales was the instructor at high school who taught freshmen bookkeeping, typing, and shorthand. She knew that she had been neglecting those courses ever since the sale on Monday; in fact, she had cut

several classes when they occurred during the last period. This was not disobeying any strict rule because Ginny had elected the business course as an "extra," which meant that she did not have to attend the classes regularly so long as she covered the required work. In October she had been ahead of the others so far as the touch-typing and shorthand drills were concerned and had received very high marks in bookkeeping. But now, on November twelfth, she was forced to face the fact that she had probably dropped behind.

"What Mr. Wales said," her father continued, "both surprised and displeased me. Apparently you have lost all interest in the business course and are planning to drop it. I can only conclude that this radio job is the explanation, since Mr. Wales thoroughly approves of the work you do in the Stall."

"I'm terribly disappointed, Ginny," Mrs. Gordon broke in. "You've always been so level-headed it never occurred to me to take you seriously when you said you were going to make radio your career. You are much too young to make such a definite decision about your future."

Ginny swallowed the lump in her throat. "It isn't that. It's just that a lot of things have been happening. I'll work

hard from now on so I'll get good marks in the tests next week."

Mr. Gordon shook his head. "In order to do that you will have to give up the emcee job or your work in the Stall. Take your choice."

Tears welled up into Ginny's big brown eyes. "I can't quit either job all of a sudden, Dad. I just can't," she wailed. "It wouldn't be fair to Mr. Adrian or to the other Hustlers."

He nodded, looking not quite so solemn now. "I can understand your attitude. Nobody wants to be a quitter, but you should have realized in the beginning that you were biting off more than you could chew."

Ginny winced. "I do realize it now," she admitted meekly.

Her father smiled. "Well, I suggest that you see Mr. Adrian right away and tell him the truth. Maybe he will suggest a co-emcee who can share the work with you. So far as the Stall is concerned, I'm sure John will assume your responsibilities temporarily, until you catch up with your school work. I'm equally sure that John will not have to cram for the tests; he always gets such high marks."

Ginny winced again. "John is just perfect," she said bitterly.

"That's right," Mrs. Gordon agreed cheerfully, "and he

would be perfect as your co-emcee, dear. Having both a master and a mistress of ceremonies would make it a much more interesting program, in my opinion. Why don't you telephone Mr. Adrian right away and make an appointment to discuss the problem with him later this afternoon?"

Mr. Gordon moved over to the window seat so that Ginny could use the phone on his desk. When she put the instrument back in its cradle she said to her parents:

"He's going to be in his office at Broadcast House around four and wants me to see him there then. Is that all right?"

Mrs. Gordon nodded. "We had such a late breakfast I'm not going to have our dinner until five-thirty. But you can have a snack now, Ginny, if you like."

"I'm not hungry," Ginny said truthfully. She couldn't swallow anything with that lump in her throat. "May I go see Mrs. Arnold now? She doesn't have a big meal on Sunday, you know, because it's Mrs. Hamelin's day off."

Mr. Gordon chuckled, his old cheery self again. "It doesn't look as if you're going to do much studying today, but run along and get all of your loose ends tied up as soon as possible so you can start fresh next week."

Ginny biked slowly along the highway toward the out-

skirts of town. It was too hot and muggy to hurry, although she knew that she would probably leave Mrs. Arnold just in time to keep her appointment with Mr. Adrian. The little old lady would talk on and on, once she heard that the Hustlers agreed with her that there *was* a mystery.

"I don't agree with any of them," Ginny told herself miserably. "I'm sure the twins sold that book by mistake on Monday. I've a good mind to follow Lucy's suggestion and put a notice in the *News*." But she knew she wouldn't do that, for many reasons. For one thing, Aunt Betsy and her parents would surely see it, and they were three people who would raise a fuss if they knew the Hustlers were in trouble. Ginny herself was in enough trouble now without adding anything more to it.

The paved highway ended in a rutted country road which was so bumpy that Ginny got off her bike and trundled it along the path beside the woods. Everything was a mess and she couldn't see any solution to her problems unless she apologized to John. And that loomed as the most impossible problem of all.

"I just can't do it," Ginny muttered. What was it Alicia Golden had said? Something about making him crawl on his hands and knees! Ginny had known, of course, that



John would never do that, but now it seemed that the reverse was going to be true if she were ever going to get out of all of her scrapes.

It began to rain as she turned off into the Arnold driveway. It was just a light drizzle, but one glance at the sky told Ginny that it would end in a downpour before long. And if the temperature should drop, the rain would become sleet or snow. She was wearing one of the culotte frocks her mother had bought her last summer in Shoemaker's High-Jinx department, a blue linen dress with a divided skirt. At this time of the year a heat wave often ended abruptly with the temperature dropping twenty degrees in an hour. Ginny shivered.

Carson's Ford was not parked behind the cottage so Ginny guessed that he and Betty had probably gone off somewhere for the rest of the day. That meant she would have to bike back to town later no matter what the weather was like.

She coasted down the driveway thinking: "I hope I freeze to death or at least get pneumonia. Then nobody would expect me to do any of the five million things I have to do next week."

Joe Dakor's mother, who was Mrs. Arnold's housekeeper

and companion, answered the door when Ginny knocked. "Oh, Ginny," Mrs. Dakor cried, "I'm so glad to see you. I've been wanting to thank you for getting me this position. I am so very happy here with dear Mrs. Arnold. And can you believe it?—I've actually gained five pounds. Young Dr. Bascom is so pleased! Joe and Lila are tickled to death, too, of course. We owe every bit of our happiness to you, dear."

She hugged Ginny affectionately and Ginny thought grimly, *At least somebody loves me, thank goodness!* Aloud she said: "I do hope Mrs. Arnold isn't taking her after-lunch nap. I've got something important to discuss with her."

"Nap!" Mrs. Arnold boomed from the parlor. "Do you take me for an invalid, Ginny Gordon? I, too, have put on five pounds since dear Mrs. Dakor came out to live with me." She appeared on the threshold clutching her gold-headed cane. "My goodness, Ginny, you are a sight for sore eyes! I've missed your visits frightfully ever since our little spat. So you have something important to discuss with me! Well, come right in and let me guess what it is." She tucked her tiny hand through Ginny's arm and led her to the beautiful antique sofa. "Now don't interrupt me," she

commanded, although Ginny hadn't opened her mouth. "I don't have to guess. I know that at last you have faced the fact that my Lewis Carroll book was stolen, and you have come out here to beg my forgiveness."

For the third time in the past hour, Ginny winced. "Yes'm," she said meekly.

"Very well." The little old lady adjusted her lovely cashmere shawl. "Now will you at long last answer my oft-repeated question: *Whom do you suspect?*"

Ginny took a deep breath and blurted, "We had a meeting of the Hustlers around noon today and decided that Mr. Camden is the only logical suspect."

Smugly Mrs. Arnold patted Ginny's hand. "Quite right of you, my dear. I have been looking into that young man's past. His father was Theodore Rawson Camden, a noted bibliophile, and his grandfather was Rawson Camden, a noted bibliopole. So it is quite probable that Ted Camden has in his possession the two *Alices* which I have long sought." She rapped on the floor with her cane. "What remains to be proved is that he now has in his possession *the complete set*."

"Yes'm," Ginny said again, "but how are we going to prove that?"

Mrs. Arnold picked up her lorgnette and peered disapprovingly at Ginny through the lenses. "You, the most famous girl detective in the county, are asking *me* that question? It is all so simple that I am amazed. Tomorrow morning Ted Camden is going to move from the Inn to the ground-floor apartment of the Dakor home. What would be more natural and gracious than for you Hustlers to offer assistance?"

Ginny shook her head. "We'll all be in school then, Mrs. Arnold. And, anyway, if he did steal 'R and R' he certainly wouldn't leave it around in plain view."

"You miss the point," Mrs. Arnold boomed. "You will offer to help him pack this very afternoon *without any warning!* That means catching him by surprise, and it will give you the opportunity to do some sleuthing in your own inimitable way. Unless I miss my guess, he is so thrilled over the fact that he has the complete Lewis Carroll set that it *will* be in plain view!"

Ginny sighed. "Lucy already did some preliminary sleuthing the day after it disappeared. I think she was wrong to do it, but she did. She searched Mr. Camden's apartment at the Inn on Tuesday afternoon and she saw no sign of *Rhyme? and Reason?* I don't mean," Ginny

added hastily, "that she went through the bureau drawers and closets, but she did tell me on Wednesday that it wasn't anywhere in sight."

"*Lucy!*" Mrs. Arnold was really angry now. "That pretty blond friend of yours, Ginny, is no sleuth, and neither is that harum-scarum Reilly girl. The book—the complete set, in fact—could be right under their noses without their suspecting it." She leaned forward slightly, her back as rigid as a ramrod. "I'm talking about you, Ginny Gordon, and you alone. Are you or are you not going to help me solve this mystery?"

Ginny knew that there was only one truthful answer to this question. In the first place she didn't dare get involved in another mystery with boarding school hanging over her head; in the second place she didn't honestly suspect Mr. Camden; and in the third place, with all of the problems that loomed ahead of her next week, she couldn't possibly spare any time for sleuthing.

So she shook her head and said sadly, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Arnold, but I can't. The other Hustlers—"

Mrs. Arnold interrupted with a loud sniff. "I am not interested in working with the others. John is, of course, the brightest boy in the county, but like my dear kind

husband, he is so very serious at all times that it would be no fun to work with him on this crime. Now mind you, Ginny," she added severely, "I do not mean to imply that Ted Camden is a criminal. When I finally prove that he did steal the book, I shall not prefer any charges against him. Instead, I shall simply offer him a fair price for the complete set. Due to carelessness on your part, he obviously purchased *Rhyme? and Reason?* for a mere song. All's fair in love and war and bibliophilism. By that I mean that I cannot even negotiate with Mr. Camden until I have definite proof that he has my Lewis Carroll." She glared at Ginny through her lorgnette. "That proof I expect you to obtain for me. You are, to use the whodunit vernacular, my leg-man. My wits have in no way been impaired by age, but physically I am incapable of. . . ."

The frail old lady rambled on and on while the patter of rain on the French windows in the parlor became the sharp thrusts of hailstones. When their clatter ceased, Ginny saw through the panes of glass that it was sleeting outside. If only Carson were home! He would drive her back to town in his Ford even if Mrs. Arnold didn't offer the limousine as she normally would have done under the circumstances. But these were not normal circumstances. Mrs.

Arnold was good and angry. Her voice reached an angry pitch as she declaimed:

"In conclusion, I repeat that the book was sold for a mere song due to your carelessness as business manager, *Virginia*. But since you are so reluctant to assist me in any way, I shall make Carson my leg-man."

"Oh, no, please," Ginny moaned. "Carson and Betty aren't in the least to blame."

The old lady's blue-veined eyelids shot up. "Who said they were, may I ask? But Carson happens to be in my employ, and on his return this evening I shall direct him to drive at once to the Inn and offer his assistance to Ted Camden. Whatever that young artist has in his possession can easily be packed in my limousine. This will give Carson ample opportunity to examine said possessions."

With the aid of her cane, Mrs. Arnold stood up, and said coldly, "You may go now, *Virginia*, and please do not darken my doorway again!"



11 • HUMBLE PIE

Hot with helpless anger and shivering with cold, Ginny biked away from the mansion. Mrs. Arnold had been too excited to notice that it was snowing now, a slushy, mushy snow which meant that the temperature was hovering between thirty and forty degrees.

Ginny guessed that she had spent an hour with the little old lady—a completely wasted hour. “Worse than wasted,” she muttered through chattering teeth. “I did more harm than good. If only Mrs. Arnold had let me do some of the talking! I could have explained to her that I can’t possibly do any sleuthing next week because of the radio program and tests in school. She would have understood and I know that she’d be awfully interested in the broadcast. But she just wouldn’t let me get a word in edgewise!”

It was after three when Ginny raced into her house

through the back door, and she was soaked to the skin. The absence of the family car meant that her parents had gone off somewhere and that was something to be thankful for. But Ginny knew that if they had been home they would have ordered her to take a hot shower and dress warmly so she did just that.

"Anything to avoid another bawling-out," she reflected as she donned a wool sweater and skirt. Short of going to a beauty parlor and spending an hour under the dryer, there was nothing she could do about her damp, curly hair.

"You look like a drowned rat," she said, sneezing, to her reflection in the mirror. "A scarf is the only answer, and for heaven's sakes, Virginia Gordon, don't sneeze in the presence of Mr. Adrian."

And then, perversely, as she set off for Broadcast House, the sun came out. By the time she reached the radio station it was almost as hot and muggy as it had been that morning. Broadcast House was an attractive little red-brick building with neat paths and flower borders where marigolds, untouched as yet by a heavy frost, bloomed profusely. Reaching from the green-shingled roof was a tower with the many silver fingers of the various antennae. They and they alone made the station different from the homes in that area.

To Ginny at that moment the silver fingers seemed to be spelling out on the sky the word *doom*. How could she tell Mr. Adrian that she was a failure? And how could she ask him to make John co-emcee when she wasn't even speaking to John? How could she explain the fact that she still had not completed her panel and had not written a letter to the publishers of *Blue Moonbeams*?

Ginny slipped inside and felt more depressed than ever. The receptionist's desk was empty and there was nobody behind the switchboard. This was Sunday the twelfth, but it felt more like Friday the thirteenth to her. She tried to walk quietly across the wide entrance hall to Mr. Adrian's office but her moccasins clattered like machine guns on the rubber-tiled floor. To make matters worse she sneezed, and at that very moment Mr. Adrian came out of his office.

"Hello, Ginny," he said, smiling. "Don't tell me you're coming down with a cold. It'll mean that your voice will be hoarse when you broadcast a week from Friday. Not that it matters particularly; the men in the control room can take care of that. But a cold at this time of the year when the weather is so changeable—well, never mind," he interrupted himself as he led the way back into his office. "What's on your mind?"

Ginny collapsed into the black leather chair beside his desk. Stuttering and stammering and sneezing for punctuation, she told him the whole truth with the exception of the missing Lewis Carroll volume. When she finished he grinned and said:

“Your mother’s a smart woman, Ginny. I agree with her thoroughly that having a boy as co-emcee will greatly increase the popularity of the program. I’ll get in touch with John right away.”

Ginny heaved a silent sigh of relief. Maybe she wouldn’t have to crawl on her hands and knees to John after all. Maybe as co-emcees they would start out tomorrow just as though nothing had ever happened to their friendship!

Mr. Adrian swiveled his chair around to stare out of the window behind his desk. “One more thing, Ginny. We haven’t solved the problem of your work in the Stall. If John is going to help you with the broadcast he can’t take over all of your responsibilities in the lending library, too. So may I offer a suggestion?”

“Of course,” Ginny cried. “I’m in such a mess now that I’d be grateful for any suggestions and I wouldn’t blame you at all if you told me to go jump in the river.”

He swiveled back to face her, laughing. “This suggestion

amounts to a personal favor. It's about my nephew, Chuck Warner. You've met him, I know."

Ginny nodded wordlessly. If Mr. Adrian was going to suggest that Chuck be co-emcee if John refused, why she would quit here and now. She had already seen enough of that grim, stuck-up boy to know that he and she could never work together on any project. Why, only Friday when she had said hello to him on the steps of the school he had walked right past her without even a faint smile. High-and-mighty juniors often ignored the presence of freshmen but Chuck's attitude was stronger than that. He had obviously taken a violent dislike to Ginny Gordon, because right after ignoring her greeting he had made a point of stopping to say a very friendly hello to Lucy.

"To tell you the truth, Ginny," Mr. Adrian was saying, "I'm a bit worried about Chuck and I think you could be a big help. You see, he spent all of his life in a town just like this in Pennsylvania. He was one of the most popular boys in the high school there, and then, at the beginning of his junior year, his father's business required them to pull up roots and move here. It was hard for Chuck to enter Harristown High so late in the term. He's the only new boy in the school."

"I know," Ginny cried with impulsive sympathy. "I'd hate to be Chuck. All the rest of us have known one another since kindergarten. But he—but he—" her voice dwindled away.

"Let me finish that sentence for you," Mr. Adrian said quietly. "He doesn't seem to want to make friends. That's what you were going to say, wasn't it? But I don't think that's the whole truth, Ginny. I think that the trouble is this: Chuck feels like a fish out of water here in Harris-town. He's afraid to make any gestures toward forming friendships because he is convinced that our high school is like the school he just left—full of tight little cliques. When I try to tell him he's wrong he stormily refers to you Hustlers as the clique to end all cliques. He claims that you five kids are such a tightly-knit unit that you don't even know any other boy and girl in town to speak to."

Ginny jumped angrily to her feet. "That's very unfair of him, Mr. Adrian. We started the Swap Shop, but who's running it now? Joe Dakor who is years older than we are. And look at the Snack Barn. We started that, but you notice it became a community project very quickly. We were very glad to turn those projects over to others. We just like to start things. We're not a clique, I tell you. We're not!"

Mr. Adrian stood up, smiling. "I know you're not, Ginny. But without your help I can't convince Chuck that you're not. So this is what I suggest. In his own home town he successfully ran a lending library exactly like yours. If you would ask him to take over your place at the Stall for the next couple of weeks, I think he'd jump at the chance to prove himself. And I don't think you'll regret it, Ginny. He's really a very bright lad—and likable, too, when you get to know him."

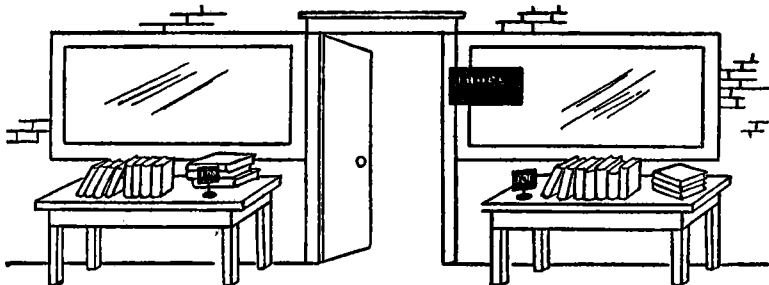
Ginny bit her lip. As Whiz would say, she was certainly on the spot! The very thought of talking to Chuck Warner about anything made her squirm inwardly. But to ask him to take over her responsibilities at the Stall—that was too much! And yet, under the circumstances she couldn't flatly turn down Mr. Adrian's suggestion. If only John were here! John would immediately say:

"Why, sure, Mr. Adrian, I'll sound out Chuck tomorrow. If he goes for the idea, we'd be glad to have him work along with the rest of us at the Stall."

That's what John would have said, but Ginny couldn't manage anything more than a mumbled, "Okay." Then, feeling hot and cold and very shaky in the knees, she turned and ran out of his office.

"Tomorrow," she reflected bitterly as she biked home, "is definitely going to be Eating Humble Pie Day for Ginny Gordon. I've got to be meek and kind to everybody, including John and Chuck. It makes me gag to think of it!"

But that night when she tumbled wearily into bed she was completely honest with herself and faced all of the unpleasant facts confronting her. "I guess," she murmured sleepily, "that when you bite off more than you can chew you have to expect a large chunk of humble pie!"



12 • THE SUN COMES OUT

As things turned out, Ginny did not have to eat such a very large chunk of humble pie after all. On her way to school Monday morning she found that John was waiting on the corner of Main and Maple Streets for the light to change.

“Hello, John,” she said tentatively.

“Hi, Ginny,” he said cheerfully. “Nice day, isn’t it? Crisp, cold November weather for a change. That heat wave was getting on our nerves, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, John,” Ginny said meekly. “I’m sorry I said what I did last week. I didn’t mean a word of it. And you were *so* right, John. I did bite off more than I can ever chew in my whole life.”

He shifted her schoolbooks from under her arm to his. “Mr. Adrian called me last evening, Ginny. I’d like to be

your co-emcee, Ginny, if you want me to. Maybe it will turn out that we've both bitten off more than we can chew, but let's give it a try. You and I as a team."

Ginny couldn't do anything but stand there and breathe, "Oh, John."

The light changed and with his free hand he escorted her across the street. Ginny felt that not only had the light changed, but the whole world had changed simultaneously. John wasn't angry with her any more, and so it followed that everything was going to be all right. Indian summer had at last come and gone; it was really fall now—cold enough so that you woke up feeling full of pep and glad to wear a cardigan over your sweater—so cold that you woke up *wanting* to study for tests—so cold and bright even at eight o'clock that you felt like singing and dancing with joy. . . .

And then gloom descended like a black cloud as John asked:

"How did you make out with Mrs. Arnold?"

"Hopeless," Ginny told him. "She's more angry than ever because she wants me to sleuth around after Mr. Camden and of course I can't. Besides, I don't honestly think he's the type who goes around swiping books."

"Neither do I," John admitted frankly. "But I was talking around the edges of our problem to Dad last night and he says that bibliophiles are not only lovers of rare books, but they're a rare lot. The only rules they follow are the ones which say that finders are keepers and that if you're too ignorant to know the value of a book you can expect to be cheated. So I don't think putting an ad in the personal column would prove anything. If a bibliophile has 'R and R' he wouldn't return it for any reward which we could hope to offer, and when you get right down to it, Ginny, if the twins sold the book by mistake, they must have sold it to a bibliophile. Mr. Jones, the grocer, for instance, wouldn't have bought it in spite of its beautiful binding. The same could be said about almost everybody else."

"How smart you are!" Ginny cried excitedly. "That's what we must do right away, make a list of all the people who came to the sale and then narrow that list down to the few who might be considered book-lovers or collectors of rare editions, or both. Let's see, the final group might include—" And without pausing she rattled off a half-dozen names.

"How smart *you* are!" John bowed, his dark-blue eyes twinkling. "And I really mean it, Ginny. You could handle

that radio program perfectly well by yourself if you had been given more time and if you weren't involved in so many other projects. I think our first step is to get someone who can help out in the Stall. Mr. Adrian suggested Chuck Warner. How do you feel about that?"

"I despise him," Ginny said, and immediately afterward could have bitten off her tongue because John stopped to stare down at her and ask with a puzzled frown:

"Why?"

"He strikes me as being awfully stuck-up," Ginny told him, "but I could be wrong. Lucy thinks he's super-glamorous perfect. I gather that he is her dream man, and she can have him so far as I am concerned."

John chuckled. "I gather that a lot of girls at school agree with Lucy. I don't know him very well, since he's in the class ahead of me, but I do think you ought to consider Mr. Adrian's suggestion. We're going to need help in the Stall until the broadcast, and you know yourself, Ginny, that the twins and Lucy would bawl up the card system in no time flat."

Ginny tossed her chestnut curls. "Oh, all *right!* You talk to your dear friend Chuck Warner today."

"Not me," John said firmly. "That's your job, Ginny.

You can explain the system to him much better than I can, and, anyway, I'm going to spend every spare minute I have so we can complete your panel today. The complimentary copies of *Blue Moonbeams* which you asked the publishers for last week should arrive any day now so we can all get right to work reviewing it."

Ginny moaned feebly. "I didn't write the publishers last week or *at all*, John. And so, since I don't know the author's address, I can't get in touch with him. And—and," she finished in a wail, "the broadcast is a week from Friday!"

John frowned, very disapprovingly now. "That letter has got to be mailed today, Ginny, no matter what happens. On second thought, maybe you'd better telephone."

Ginny shook her head. "I did look up their address and it's someplace in the Middle West. I'll write the letter right after school and send it air mail."

"Gleeps!" John clutched his wavy black hair with his free hand. "Suppose the author lives out West? Do you think our program is important enough to make him fly here?"

Ginny's moan became a loud groan. "I really don't know, John. All I can do is try."

They separated then to go to their home rooms. En route

Ginny passed Chuck Warner in the corridor and forced herself to greet him cheerily:

"Hi, Chuck. Can you spare a minute?"

He took two strides, stopped, and turned around to face her. "Yes? The warning bell is going to ring in just about one minute."

Eating this humble pie was so distasteful that Ginny could hardly keep from showing how she felt. But somehow she managed to say calmly, "We need help in our lending library and your uncle, Mr. Adrian, said you would be perfect for the job. I know this is asking a big favor, Chuck, but we sure would appreciate it if you could give us some of your spare time after school for the next couple of weeks."

He glowered at her, his brown eyes very dark. "I have no spare time, and if I did, why should I give it to you?"

Ginny controlled a desire to slap his handsome face and said meekly, "There isn't any real reason, Chuck, except that we'd like to have you. I mean, we'd like to get to know you better so maybe sometime you might consider becoming a member of our club."

At that his expression changed and he almost smiled. "Do you mean you let other people—rank outsiders—



newcomers to town—join your select organization?”

“Of course I mean it,” Ginny cried impulsively. “And it isn’t really an organization. It’s just that John and I grew up together and the twins are his cousins and when Lucy moved to town not so long ago she became my best friend.”

His eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Lucy Tryon? Is she a newcomer, too?”

“That’s right,” Ginny said. “And she likes you a lot, Chuck. I just know you two would make a wonderful team in the Stall.”

His smile became a grin. “Well, okay, if you put it that way. I mean, if you really need me. I don’t have to do much cramming for the tests this week because just about all I’ve done since we moved to town was study. At home—I mean, in Cottersville—it was different. We kids had a portable lending library, too; I set up the card system. Did you set up yours?”

Ginny nodded. “It’s really quite simple, but Lucy—I mean the Reilly twins seem to be baffled by it. They don’t seem to realize that you can’t lend or return books without making a record of it.”

He chuckled and Ginny swiftly faced another fact. Chuck Warner, in a pleasant mood, was really a very nice-

looking boy. "Okay," he said. "Meet you at the Stall around three-thirty."

The warning bell rang and they hurried off in opposite directions. In the home room which they shared, Ginny hurriedly brought Lucy up to date on events.

"Oh, it's just too divine," Lucy whispered back. "Chuck Warner, my very own ideal, our new business manager! I forgive you for everything now, Ginny. You can spend all of the time you like on your old radio program and I'll never say another cross word to you."

After school, as they strolled arm-in-arm toward Station Plaza, she said it all over again in enthusiastic detail. "I'm also glad, of course, Ginny, that you and John have made up. That's what I'm really so *very* glad about. I always said that you and he working together would make a great success of that radio program." She added wistfully, "I do hope Chuck and I can work together well. He's awfully bright and I'm so dumb."

"You're not dumb at all, sweetie," Ginny cried loyally. "I'm counting on you to make things easy for Chuck. All I have time for is to show him the files. After that I've got to write an important letter. Thank goodness John got together a complete panel during lunch and they all agree

on *Moonbeams* as our first choice!"

Half an hour later, confident that Chuck understood the card system even better than she did, Ginny settled down behind the desk in the Stall and wrote the first draft of the letter to the publishers of *Blue Moonbeams*. John came in then and greeted Chuck cordially. After that he read the letter, made some suggestions for improving it, and departed.

Ginny carefully typed the final draft, making a carbon copy of it. She had just finished sealing and stamping the envelope when Alicia Golden wandered in. Chuck was busy rearranging the whodunit shelf which was always in a jumble, but he turned and straightened when Ginny introduced him to Alicia.

"Chuck's our new business manager," Ginny explained. "Don't return or borrow any books without his approval."

Alicia dimpled. "I wouldn't dare! My, Chuck, you're as tall and broad-shouldered as Ti—I mean, as any grown man, and twice as good-looking."

Chuck flushed and turned back to the shelf but Ginny guessed that the compliment had pleased him. After Alicia left with a new mystery he said, "Say, she's pretty! Looks a lot like Lucy, doesn't she?" And then, as though ashamed

of the warmth and friendliness in his voice, he marched quickly outside to busy himself with the books on display.

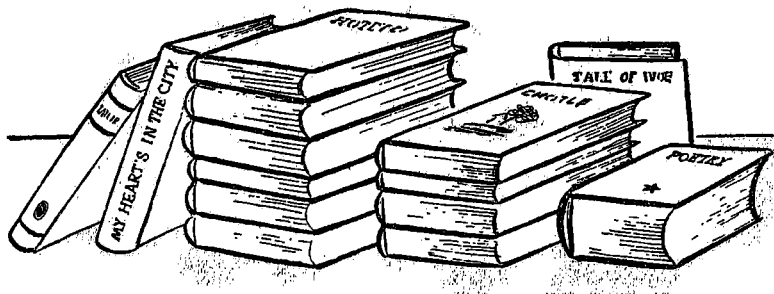
On her way to the post office with the letter to the publishers of *Moonbeams*, Ginny said to Chuck, "If John comes back while I'm gone, will you ask him to read the carbon on my desk? It's a very important letter having to do with the broadcast, you know."

He said nothing, and Ginny hurried off thinking, "I guess he could be nice if he didn't try so hard to be disagreeable. But he certainly is smart; I don't know of anybody except John who could have caught on to our filing system so quickly."

It was such a relief to have somebody else in the Stall coping with the business management, and to know that John had completed the panel! Ginny left the post office and strolled toward home feeling sure that she could do enough cramming that afternoon and evening to make sure that she got good marks in the tests. The oral math test which she had had that morning had been a cinch; math was Ginny's best subject. She was confident that the written exam tomorrow would be simple, too, if she could concentrate. When your mind was muddled with worries you were apt to make mistakes in simple arithmetic even though

you thoroughly understood the principles of algebra.

Ginny's mind was not in the least muddled now. Everything was going to be all right. If the publishers replied immediately by air mail, as she had requested, she would be in touch with the author by the end of the week. And the four review copies of *Blue Moonbeams* should arrive in plenty of time so that every member of the panel would be able to study it long before the broadcast, which was scheduled for a week from Friday. November twenty-fourth seemed a long way off.



13 • SCRAPS AND A MYSTERY

Some, but by no means *all* of Ginny's optimistic predictions did come true. She passed the tests with flying colors and proudly brought home her first-quarter report card on Friday the seventeenth. And waiting for her at the Stall the next morning was a letter from the publishers of *Moonbeams* stating that:

We are very happy to be sending you immediately under separate cover four (4) complimentary copies of Wilcox Putnam's great novel. These should reach you not later than Monday, November twentieth.

Concerning Mr. Putnam's appearance on your proposed radio program, we suggest that you communicate at once with his agent, Mr. Timothy O'Leary of East Forty-second Street, New York City.

Ginny tried to obey this suggestion but was told by the

Telephone Answering Service that Mr. O'Leary was away and would not be back until late Monday afternoon.

"Now what?" she asked John, who had accompanied her to the phone at the store around the corner from the Stall.

Without hesitation John said soberly: "Send a special delivery letter to Mr. O'Leary right away, and be emphatic. Explain that we are counting on Mr. Putnam to be our guest on the broadcast next Friday. At the same time be tactful. Throw yourself on the agent's mercy. Make it clear that if Mr. Putnam turns us down we're ruined."

He opened the door of the Stall and followed Ginny inside, still talking. Chuck, busy with the files, didn't even look up, and John continued:

"You know, Ginny, maybe it's already too late to hope for Mr. Putnam. Maybe we ought to tell Mr. Adrian how matters stand. He'd probably suggest another author whom we could telephone right away."

"Never," Ginny said firmly. "My heart is set on *Moonbeams*. Mr. Putnam will surely be able to give Mr. O'Leary his answer on Monday. If it's no, that will be soon enough for us to try somebody else—somebody not so famous."

Chuck did look up then, but he addressed his quiet comments to the air above his head. "Never heard of such a

slaphappy way of running things! Professional emcees sign up their guests months ahead of time—months and *months* ahead of time when they want somebody like Mr. Putnam.”

John pretended to ignore these remarks and Ginny followed suit, although she had to bite her tongue in order to keep from telling Chuck to mind his own business.

“I didn’t count on the week ends when I was figuring the time,” she confessed to John. “That was dumb of me, but if I get that letter off to Mr. O’Leary right away, I should receive his reply on Tuesday.”

Chuck moved away from the desk and she settled down behind her typewriter.

“There are ten members on my list of shut-ins who want books for the week end,” John said, browsing along the shelves. “I’d better take care of them right away.”

“There’s not room for two of us to work at that small desk simultaneously,” Chuck said sourly. “In my humble opinion, no business should be carried on in this Stall unless it has to do with the lending library.”

Ginny felt like screaming: “Humble, indeed! You’re about as humble as the American Bald Eagle!” Instead she swiftly moved her portable over to the top of a shelf and, using the extra chair, began to work from that uncomfort-

able position. It was so uncomfortable and the letter was so difficult to write that she tore up four first drafts before she finally decided that she had produced something which was neatly typed and which was also, to use John's words, emphatic, tactful, and definite. She was scrabbling through the desk drawer for a special delivery stamp when Alicia wandered in.

She looked so young in her pale blue sweater and skirt that for a moment Ginny thought she was Lucy and paid no attention to her. In fact, Ginny was so absorbed in her problem that she only vaguely heard Chuck say something about it being time for his lunch. He was gone before she realized that she should have asked him to drop the letter off at the post office.

"What a dope I am!" she moaned. "Now I'll have to wait until somebody comes in to take my place."

"If it's that letter you're moaning about," Alicia said with a giggle, "I'll mail it for you. I'm about to depart with some more whodunits anyway." She held out her hand for the envelope.

"Oh, thanks a lot, Alicia," Ginny cried gratefully. "It's just got to leave town today. Tomorrow would be too late. I—" And then to her amazement, Alicia uttered a sharp

little scream and tore the envelope into many small pieces.

"You can't, *you can't*, I won't let you," she shrieked. "Oh, Ginny, how could you be so mean? I know you're a famous detective, but it never occurred to me that you'd spy on *me*." She sank down into the chair which Ginny had just vacated and burst into tears.

Ginny was so surprised she couldn't think of a word to say. She felt like crying herself as she stooped to pick up the shreds of the letter on which she had worked so hard.

"I thought you and Harristown were different," Alicia was sobbing. "But you're not. You're mean and suspicious and a busybody—and oh, so cruel!"

Ginny lost her temper then. "I'm not any of those things," she denied hotly. "I didn't spy on you although I do suspect that Alicia Golden isn't your right name."

Alicia raised her head and shouted back stormily. "It is so my right name." She yanked open her handbag. "Here's my driver's license to prove it. If that doesn't convince you, you can search my room at the Inn *again*. You'll have better luck this time than you did on Monday because I'll tell you exactly where my birth certificate is. It's in my jewel case and here's the key."

Ginny sank down in the other chair. "Oh, Alicia, please,"

she begged. "I don't know what you're talking about. I've never been inside your room at the Inn."

"Don't add fibbing to your other crimes," Alicia yelled. "Somebody searched my suitcases right after they were moved from the White Elephant to Mr. Camden's old room on Monday. I didn't think anything of it then because I thought maybe one of the Inn's maids had started to unpack my things and had been interrupted before she could finish. But now I know it was you!"

Suddenly Ginny thought she knew the answer to part of this baffling conversation. Babs and Lucy and Carson were probably the guilty ones. They were supposed to do some sleuthing while Mr. Camden moved to the Dakor place and find out if he had the missing Lewis Carroll book. Since Alicia's luggage had obviously been moved from the White Elephant around the same time, it would have been easy for one of them to open her bags by mistake. Thinking out loud Ginny said:

"Babs is the answer, of course. That's just the kind of mistake she is forever making."

Alicia blinked. "That fat little redheaded Reilly girl *was* lurking in the corridor just before I discovered that someone had been rummaging through my suitcases. I

probably wouldn't have noticed her except that I do love people with red hair. She and her brother are simply darling, I think." She interrupted herself with a frown. "But that's neither here nor there. Good heavens, Ginny, you're right. I'm getting more like little old Mrs. Arnold every day. I leap around from subject to subject like a mountain goat, don't I?" She went off into gales of laughter. "Oh, dear! I was as cross as a grizzly bear a moment ago, wasn't I? Some day you'll understand why I was so upset. But right now, please answer one simple question. Why on earth should Babs Reilly or anybody else spy on me? Why should anybody think I'm intriguing?"

Ginny joined in her laughter and explained. When she finished Alicia exploded:

"That's a small town for you! Just because Mr. Camden is a newcomer you all think he's a thief. I'm certainly glad I arrived after that book disappeared." Changing the subject abruptly, as she often did, she added, "How are plans for the broadcast going, Ginny?"

Ginny brought her up-to-date on events finishing with, "So you can see I just have to get this letter off to Mr. Putnam's agent right away. What's left of it, I mean."

Alicia covered her face with her lovely hands. "Oh, Ginny, I'm so sorry. What a complete idiot I am! I'm a mountain goat in other ways, too—always jumping to conclusions, wrong conclusions, mostly." She reached over to snatch up the two torn parts of the envelope. "But don't you worry. I'm a very good typist, believe it or not, so if you'll let me, I'll take these back to the Inn and make a nice copy of the contents right away. And I'll mail the letter myself at the post office."

She was gone before Ginny could say a word. Ginny stared through the window until Alicia was out of sight. Lucy came in then, and Ginny told her what had happened.

"Alicia gets more mysterious by the minute! But one thing is sure. *I* didn't search her luggage on Monday. Babs must have done it during the lunch hour. I don't remember seeing her in the cafeteria, do you?"

Ginny shook her head. "That doesn't bother me particularly since no real harm was done. What does baffle me is why Alicia tore up that letter in the first place. She took one quick look at it and went into a terrible rage, Lucy. Why?"

"It's beyond me," Lucy admitted. "If she were here incognito we could make all sorts of guesses, but since you

saw her driver's license and know that her real name is Alicia Golden, I frankly don't know what to think."

"I'm beginning to think," said Ginny with a chuckle, "that I had better stop thinking. Period. Every time I do I get more involved. John will probably have a fit when he finds out that I didn't mail that letter myself."

"Then don't tell him," Lucy said promptly. "If you two quarrel again so soon after making up I'll have a nervous breakdown. What with doing my work here at the Stall and sleuthing around after Mr. Camden—"

"Wh-at?" Ginny interrupted. "What sleuthing have you done, Lucy? What sleuthing could you possibly do?"

"Plenty," Lucy said smugly. She added mysteriously, "Enough, anyway, so that Carson and Babs and I are positive that Mr. Camden is not the culprit."

"Well, that's something to be happy about," Ginny replied wearily. "Whom do you suspect now?"

Lucy fluffed her hair. "It's no concern of yours. Just stick to your broadcasting, madam. Now may I go home to lunch, please?"

Ginny grabbed her arm. "Are you keeping secrets from me, your best friend, Lucy Tryon?"

"John's orders," Lucy said airily. "The great, tempera-

mental emcee is not to be disturbed until after her debut on the air next Friday. Besides, it's really no secret. You gave him the list of suspects we're narrowing down."

"List of suspects?" Ginny repeated. "I never even made such a list, let alone gave it to anybody."

Chuck appeared in the doorway then and Lucy whirled around to face him with a smile. "Oh, Chuck," she cried, "I'm so glad you're back. I'm simply starving but I didn't dare budge until you had a chance to check in these books which I just collected from members on my list."

Chuck smiled at her and reached for the date stamp and pencil. "No sooner said than done. Sorry I kept you waiting."

Humph, thought Ginny impatiently, *I could have checked in those books while Lucy and I were chatting. She's really so crazy about Chuck Warner that she's positively silly!* But she managed to control her impatience as she slipped on her cardigan and said:

"Well, I'm off for lunch, too, Chuck. Okay?"

He ignored her in that maddening way of his. Evidently he considered that all of Ginny's questions were so rhetorical that they didn't deserve answers. Or maybe he felt that they were so stupid that answering them was beneath his

dignity. It was all that Ginny could do to control her own dignity as she swept past him out into the street. Fuming with rage she waited on the corner for Lucy to join her, but Lucy didn't. Instead Whiz and Babs emerged from the candy store armed with double-decker ice-cream cones.

"Oh, fine," Ginny greeted them sourly. "I thought you were going to reduce, Babs Reilly."

"I am," Babs retorted unconcernedly. "I haven't had a thing to eat since breakfast. And I'll have you know that ice cream isn't really fattening. It's the best all-round food in the world. Lots of movie actresses stay young and beautiful all of their lives and they practically exist on ice cream." She stuck out her tongue at Ginny. "That's what Mr. Camden told me and he ought to know. He is very, very chummy with celebrities."

Ginny sighed. "Since when did you get so very, very chummy with him? Last time I heard you mention his name you were convinced that he was a thief."

Whiz waved his cone and almost lost the upper half of it. "You're behind the times, Ginny. Due to some careful and brilliant questioning on my part, it has been ascertained that although Mr. Camden is a college graduate he knows nothing whatsoever about snarks and couldn't care

less. Therefore, it stands to reason that he did not swipe *Rhyme? and Reason?* Why, that man doesn't even know that Jack London wrote *The Hunting of the Snark*! I mentioned the title to him in a devious way and got no spark at all. If he were the culprit he would certainly have given a guilty start. Therefore—"

"Oh, stop it," Ginny interrupted. "You've got me so confused with your snarks and starts and sparks, I don't know whether you're talking about Mr. Camden or Lewis Carroll or Jack London. The point is, if you no longer suspect Mr. Camden, please tell me whom you do suspect."

"Oh, Ginny," Babs gurgled. "You know perfectly well that we all suspect the same person you suspect. After all, his name was right there in big bold letters on your list."

"That's right," Whiz agreed. "I took one look at that list after John turned it over to me and knew at once who Suspect number one was."

"So did Mrs. Arnold," Babs added, "when Lucy and I turned over our copy of the list to her. Carson agrees, too, thank goodness. I think it was just wonderful of you, Ginny, to have figured it all out even though you started off all wrong. I guess you'll never again accuse Whiz and me of selling valuable books for a dime."

"But I never made out any list," Ginny protested. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Whiz howled with laughter and Babs cried, "Oh, we forgot. John said we weren't to discuss this with you until after the broadcast. Well, 'by for now, Ginny."

They raced off toward the Stall and Ginny glared after them. It was all so frustrating that she could hardly bear it. The only list she had made out this month was a list of tentative book titles for the broadcast.

Only one thing was certain, John had told them all that she, Ginny Gordon, was not to be mixed up in the mystery until after the broadcast. And, since John was always right, the smart thing for her to do was to pretend that she knew absolutely nothing about that mysterious list which she truthfully knew absolutely nothing about!



14 • A JINX AT WORK

"How are plans for the broadcast proceeding?" Mr. Gordon asked Ginny during lunch.

"Fine," Ginny said. "We've got a grand panel. Bob and Jean who are in John's class and Nick and Sally from the twins' class. I don't know them very well but John says they like to read and aren't at all shy."

Mrs. Gordon sighed. "I'm so glad John is helping you and that you have that nice Chuck Warner working in the Stall. Now that you know him better you must agree with everyone else in town that he has charming manners."

"No, I don't," Ginny said flatly. "He's so rude to me that I can hardly bear to be in that cubbyhole at the same time that he's there. Thank goodness I don't have to go back today. It's apt to get terribly crowded on Saturday afternoons, and frankly, I would rather study than rub elbows

with a person like Chuck Warner.”

“What are you going to work on?” her father asked curiously. “I was surprised to notice yesterday that you didn’t bring home any books from school.”

“I don’t need—” Ginny began and interrupted herself. “Oh, dear, I forgot to bring home from the Stall *My Heart’s in the City*. The only assignment I have for the week end is a book review, and I decided to do that one since I seem to be the only person in town who hasn’t read it.”

As soon as she finished washing the luncheon dishes, Ginny hurried back to the Stall. Alicia was out in front talking animatedly to Chuck, so rather than interrupt them Ginny took the Myra Swenson novel from the shelf and left without telling Chuck that she had borrowed it. All week he had made it plain that he didn’t like anybody else to touch the files, and since Ginny planned to return the book right after school on Monday she felt that it wasn’t necessary to make a record of the fact that she had borrowed it. There was no demand for it any more because every member who didn’t own a copy had already read it.

When she got home she curled up on the sofa in the den and soon became so absorbed in the novel that she was surprised to discover later that it had been snowing all

afternoon. Sunday was another cloudy day but so much warmer that the snow turned to slush and Ginny was glad to stay indoors to work on her book report. On Monday she read it aloud in class and was told by the English teacher that she would receive a very high mark if the spelling and punctuation were up to her usual standard.

After school Ginny hurried to the Stall and was relieved to find that the postman had slipped a notice under the door stating that a package had arrived from the publishers of *Moonbeams*. Ginny raced off to the post office and unpacked the carton the minute she brought it back to the Stall. Chuck had opened the door and the display windows by then but none of the others had shown up yet.

"Thank goodness the books have arrived," Ginny said more to herself than to Chuck. "John and I can distribute them this very afternoon."

As usual, Chuck ignored her presence, but Ginny was too busy with her own thoughts to mind. She put the books back in the carton and shoved it under the desk. "There," she said to herself, "now they'll be safe even from the twins."

Whiz appeared then to browse along the shelves. "Hey," he yelled suddenly, "where's that Myra Swenson book?"



"Right there where it was on Saturday," Chuck told him. "Nobody borrowed it."

"Well, it's not," Whiz retorted. "Maybe you put it on display and forgot."

"I never forget things like that," Chuck informed him loftily. He rifled through the card files and added; "Just as I thought. *My Heart's in the City* has got to be on that shelf."

Whiz snorted. "I'm not blind, big shot. And listen, brain, I'm getting sick of your attitude. Just because you're three years older than I am doesn't mean that you're always right and I'm always wrong."

"Temper, temper!" Alicia had poked her head in the door. Smiling mischievously, she came inside. "My goodness, Whiz, when you grow up you're going to be exactly like—like a man I know—used to know—who has red hair and freckles and a fiery temper."

Chuck had been glowering before, but now he grinned and said, "Hi, 'Lish."

Whew! Ginny thought, *those two certainly are chummy!* And then she remembered something and blurted with embarrassment, "Oh, I'm sorry, Chuck. I borrowed the book on Saturday and instead of returning it this afternoon

I left it in my locker at school, like a dope.”

He whirled on her, his brown eyes dark with rage. “*You* borrowed it and made no record on the cards?”

“That’s right,” Ginny admitted ruefully. “I didn’t think there’d be any call for it.”

“Well, there is,” Whiz told her impatiently. “We signed up some new members over the week end and one of them craves to read that book.”

“I’m terribly sorry,” Ginny repeated. “I’ll go get it right away. I’ll deliver it for you, Whiz. Who’s the new member?”

“Don’t bother, Queen of the Air,” Whiz said sarcastically. “Just give me your locker key and I’ll cope.” He started off but Chuck grabbed his plump arm.

“Wa-it a minute,” Chuck said firmly. “That book doesn’t go anywhere until it’s been properly stamped—*by me!*”

Whiz jerked away from him. “Don’t get rough, boy. I’ll bring the dern thing back so you can stamp it to your heart’s content. But let’s get this straight. If you must throw your weight around, try not to do it when I’m among those present. It riles me. Get it? Rile as in Reilly.”

After Whiz left, Alicia collapsed on the desk, overcome

by laughter. "Rile as in Reilly! Aren't redheads wonderful? Honestly, why didn't I think of that before? Leer as in Leary is even better. Or moth as in Ti—" her voice died away in a giggle.

"Or warn as in Warner," Chuck cut in. "I mean it, Ginny. I'm warning you right now. If you ever again take a book out without telling me, I'll quit."

It was on the tip of Ginny's tongue to yell, "Please do. Nothing would suit me better." But just in time she remembered that the next few days were going to be the busiest in her whole life. Without Chuck's help in the Stall she and John would never be able to complete plans for the broadcast in time. So she said meekly, "I'm sorry, It won't happen again."

Alicia sobered. "What book caused all this fracas anyway?"

"The one we were discussing yesterday," Chuck told her. "*My Heart's in the City*. A great novel, but Ginny doesn't seem to think much of it."

Alicia glanced at Ginny curiously. "What *do* you think of it?"

"I think it's beautifully written," Ginny replied, "but I really doubt if the author was sincere. As I wrote in my

report, 'she doth protest too much.' Nobody who has so much imagination and such a charming style could really like to live all the year 'round in a crowded city like New York."

Alicia sniffed. "How can you say a thing like that, Ginny Gordon? You've never lived in a big city."

"She completely missed the message in the novel," Chuck said deridingly. "I can identify myself with Miss Swenson's heroine because I didn't spend all of my life in the same small town. When we moved here I soon found out how narrow-minded and mean suburbanites can be."

"Well, I don't know about that," Alicia argued. "I'm a newcomer to Harristown, too, and so far everyone has been charming."

"You forget," Chuck pointed out, "that Miss Swenson's heroine was a teen-ager. Kids suffer much more from slights than grownups."

Alicia frowned. "Yes, they do, and I'm beginning to think that the environment has nothing to do with it. Everybody suffers during the growing-up process, and I guess it really doesn't matter where he or she lives at the time." As though completely lost in her own thoughts, she wandered toward the door. Then she asked over her

shoulder, "I dropped in, Ginny, to find out if you'd received a reply to the letter I mailed on Saturday."

"No," Ginny replied. "I hope to tomorrow."

Alicia turned, a worried expression on her face. "If the answer is no, what on earth will you do?"

"That's one bridge," Ginny said, "I'm not going to cross until I come to it."

After Alicia left, Chuck said, "You're crazy to think you can get Wilcox Putnam at this late date. Boy, have you ever made a mess of that radio program!"

Ginny's cheeks flamed. "If you're so wonderful why didn't your uncle ask you to be the emcee?"

His lips were a taut white line. "Because I'm a newcomer. You've lived here all your life but you had a pretty hard time getting a panel. What chance would I have had? And in case you're interested, Uncle Hu is sorry now that he didn't give me the job. I emceed a teen-age radio program back home which was *not* a flop."

"Mine's not a flop either," Ginny retorted angrily.

"Oh, no?" His dark eyebrows shot up. "What about the publicity angle? It should have been written up in all the New York newspapers this week, but Uncle Hu can't even give it much of a plug over his own station until you tell

him who your guest is going to be.”

Ginny sank back into her chair. “Oh, me, oh, my! I forgot all about that angle. I guess I’d better telephone Mr. O’Leary right now instead of waiting for his letter.”

“Guess,” Chuck jeered. “That’s the trouble with you. You’re always guessing or thinking. You should have *known* that telephoning the agent today was the only way to speed up matters. Now it’s too late. It’s after five and his office will be closed.”

“It can’t be five,” Ginny wailed. “Why, it seems as though I left school only an hour ago.”

“It’s after five,” Chuck repeated, showing her his wrist watch. “You’ve spent a lot of valuable time this afternoon doing exactly nothing, haven’t you?”

This was too much for Ginny. She jumped up and ran out of the Stall and around the corner to the candy store. There, blinded by tears, she searched frantically through the New York directory for Mr. O’Leary’s number. Maybe his office didn’t close on the dot of five.

But when Ginny finally dialed the number she was connected with the Telephone Answering Exchange:

“Sorry. Mr. O’Leary has left for the day.”

Ginny hung up and staggered out of the booth. “Chuck

Warner," she told herself miserably, "is the meanest boy in the world. He could have told me to call the agent before five, but he carefully waited until it was too late. He doesn't want me to be a success as an emcee. He wants the program to be a flop."

Outside in the cold air Ginny squared her shoulders and faced the fact that Chuck was not in the least to blame for the trouble she was in. It was all her own fault because she had stubbornly insisted upon having Wilcox Putnam on the program, against the advice of everyone else. Now she must face the music and that meant telling Mr. Adrian that she wouldn't know until tomorrow whether or not the famous author would appear.

She picked up her warm jacket at the Stall and hurriedly biked to Broadcast House. Mr. Adrian was still in his office and he greeted her with a puzzled frown.

"I was wondering when you'd get in touch with me. Didn't you get the message I left on your desk Friday?"

Ginny shook her head. "I went straight home from school on Friday, with my report card, you know. But I should have got in touch with you before this anyway. I'm sorry, Mr. Adrian, I forgot all about the publicity you planned. Will tomorrow be too late?"

When she had explained, he shook his head. "We'll just have to wait now until you hear from Mr. Putnam's agent. You can't very well contact two authors at the same time. Suppose both of them accepted?"

"That's the trouble," Ginny admitted. "Oh, I wish I'd never heard of Wilcox Putnam."

Mr. Adrian smiled. "Maybe he'll accept. And don't worry about the publicity. I started the ball rolling this week end and the whole idea is so novel that most papers have featured it. But by this time tomorrow I must know definitely the title of the book and that the author will be your guest." He stood up. "By the way, I'd like to have a picture taken of you and John and the panel. Could you arrange to meet in front of Broadcast House around four tomorrow?"

"Fine." Ginny biked hurriedly back to the Stall and found that John and the two boys who were going to be on the panel were waiting impatiently for her out in front.

"Well, did the books arrive?" John asked. "Bob and Nick want to read it tonight."

"Thank goodness they did," Ginny cried breathlessly. "It's the only good thing that did happen today."

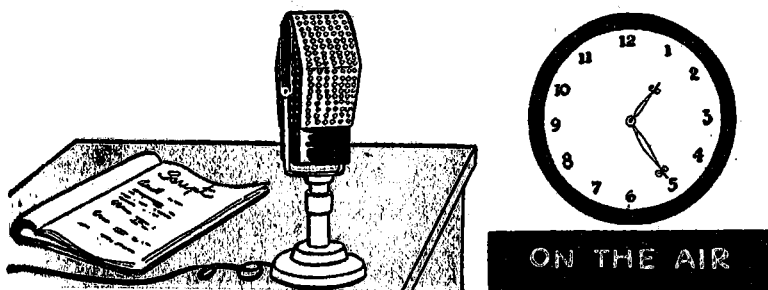
"Well, make it snappy," Nick said. "I'm in a hurry."

Ginny led the way inside. "I don't see why you waited for me. Chuck could have told you where they were."

"He's gone home for supper," John said. "We asked him before he left if the books had arrived and he said he knew nothing about them."

Ginny uttered a short laugh. "How quaint can he get? I opened the carton while he was here. I even told him that the books had arrived. . . . No," she corrected herself. "I guess I was sort of talking to myself then, but unless he's stone deaf he must have heard me. And unless he's blind, he must have seen me shove the carton under the desk. You can see it from here, can't you, John? Yank it out, please."

John did as she suggested. Then he straightened with a puzzled expression on his face. "The carton's here, all right, Ginny. *But it's empty!*"



15 • WORRY—EITHER WAY

"Those twins," Ginny wailed. "They must have loaned the books to some of the members on their list."

"Don't be insane," John said sternly. "They probably never even saw the carton. And even if they did, they would have known how important it was."

"I doubt that," Ginny said crossly. "They're not the least bit interested in the program. In fact, they're downright disagreeable about it. Only a while ago Whiz called me Queen of the Air."

Bob laughed without humor. "Well, come on, Queen. Produce the books with your magic wand. I've got to scram."

"I can't wait for hocus-pocus," said Nick disgustedly. "I'm going to get heck for being late to supper as it is."

He dashed away with the older boy at his heels.

"What a mess!" John exploded. "I wouldn't be surprised if those two guys resigned from the panel. The girls are going to be pretty sore, too, unless I show up at their homes before evening with their copies of *Moonbeams*. Where on earth *are* those review copies, Ginny?"

"Maybe Chuck didn't know that they *were* review copies," Ginny cried hopefully. "Maybe he put them into circulation. Look on the shelves, John, while I check the card files. . . . Mmm. No. There's only one card for *Moonbeams*. We never did have but one rental copy."

"Not a one on the shelves," John said a moment later. "Are you sure that carton really contained books, Ginny? Maybe somebody in the packaging department of the publishing house made a mistake."

"Don't *you* be insane," Ginny shouted. "I examined all four of the books before I put them back into the carton." She reached out to grab John's arm. "Do you suppose the same person who stole 'R and R' had anything to do with their mysterious disappearance?"

"I doubt it," said John. "And there's no use standing around here guessing. You've read *Moonbeams* so you can write a synopsis of it this evening. Make five copies—one for me and one for each member of the panel. That's the

only thing we can do at this late date."

Ginny moaned. "Well, don't count on me. I couldn't write more than a paragraph or two and I can't remember half of the characters' names. I'd have to read the book again, John, and Mrs. Arnold has our only copy."

He shrugged. "Well, get it back from her. She must have borrowed it some time last week so she's probably finished it by now."

Ginny glanced at the card. "That's true, but, John, she's mad at me. If I ask her for it she'll probably renew it instead of returning it."

John glared at her. "Oh, Ginny, you know perfectly well that Mrs. Arnold never stays mad longer than five minutes. She'll be delighted to see you."

"She'll be more delighted to see *you*," Ginny came right back at him. "It's dark now, and my parents would have a fit if I biked out there."

"I'm not suggesting that you bike out tonight," John replied. "You can go tomorrow morning before school."

"Well, thanks," Ginny said sarcastically. "You're so gallant, Sir Galahad."

John smiled slowly. "Let's not quarrel, Ginny. We're both on edge because we're worried. I can't go out to Mrs.

Arnold's tomorrow morning because I've got to be in school early to help decorate the stage for the seventh grade play. And I can't go out tonight because as soon as Chuck comes back I've got to spend the rest of the evening trying to placate the members of our panel. If those kids quit we're licked. Everybody else who would be any good is going away for the Thanksgiving holidays."

"Oh, I forgot that angle." Ginny lightly touched John's hand and said apologetically, "I'm sorry. And before I forget something else important, will you tell the kids this evening that we have to pose for a publicity picture tomorrow at four o'clock in front of Broadcast House?"

John nodded. Chuck came back then and John immediately asked him if he had any idea where the missing books could be.

"With Ginny running things they could be anywhere," Chuck said. "She probably took them home. That's what happened to another book that was missing."

Ginny's cheeks flamed. "And I suppose I'll never hear the end of it."

"They could be in your locker at school," Chuck said evenly. "You dash in and out of here so frequently that I can't keep track of you."

"Nobody asked you to," Ginny retorted angrily. "A little while ago you said that I never did anything."

"Children, children," John admonished. He punched Chuck lightly on the arm. "Pay no attention to her sharp tongue, fella. Her bark is a lot worse than her bite."

"Oh, I don't know about that." Chuck punched John back good-naturedly. "Her bite's pretty bad when she bites off more than she can chew."

John chuckled. "Well, I'm off, and you'd better go home to supper now, too, Ginny. It must be close to six-thirty."

"Closer to seven," said Chuck, displaying his watch.

"Oh, oh," Ginny moaned, throwing her jacket around her shoulders. "I forgot that we were going to have dinner at six so Lila could leave early." She dashed out but John caught up with her at the corner.

"Listen, Ginny," he said soberly, "try not to snarl at Chuck so much. He's a good guy but he's got a chip on his shoulder. He's homesick for Cottersville High."

"I wish he'd go back there," Ginny said fretfully. "And I don't snarl at him. He picks on *me* from morning to night."

"Use your vivid imagination," John said patiently. "How would you like it if your dad suddenly moved to another

town in another state? I've heard your views on the subject of boarding school so I know that down inside you're sympathetic with Chuck's problem. I also have a pretty good idea of why he picks on you."

"I have, too," Ginny said more quietly. "I think he was dying for the emcee job, John, and he'll never forgive me for getting it. Oh, how I wish his uncle had given it to him instead of to me!"

John laughed. "So you no longer wish to be Queen of the Air?"

"Don't mention the word air to me." Ginny dug her fists into the pockets of her skirt. "If I'm still alive after Friday I'll never even listen to the radio again. All it's ever meant to me is Trouble with a capital T. Even our basketball coach is mad at me because I never show up for practice after school."

"Cheer up," said John as they stopped at her front steps. "The basketball season doesn't really start until after the Thanksgiving holidays. Good night and good luck tomorrow with Mrs. Arnold."

Ginny hurried indoors and found that her parents were in the living room. "I'm sorry I'm late," she gasped. "Just about everything happened to delay me. I'm glad you

didn't wait dinner—I'm not the least bit hungry."

Mr. Gordon ruffled the copy of the *News* he was reading. Mrs. Gordon's knitting needles clicked. Otherwise there was silence in the pretty room. Ginny slipped off her jacket and carefully put it on a hanger in the hall closet. The living room was dark except for the pools of light shed by the lamps beside her parents' chairs. The dining room was as dark as a pocket. Not a sound came from the kitchen beyond it. And suddenly Ginny realized that she *was* hungry, but under the circumstances she couldn't even fix herself a sandwich. Forlornly she started upstairs, and then she heard her mother say:

"Your dinner is on a hot plate in the oven, dear. But before you eat I wish you would give us some explanation of why you were so late."

"Very inconsiderate of you, Ginny," Mr. Gordon added gruffly. "You know that Lila and Joe are going to get married next Saturday. She leaves us for good and all on Wednesday afternoon. When that happens are you going to be a help or a hindrance to your mother?"

Ginny came slowly back into the room to sit on the hearth rug. "I'm going to be a help, Dad," she promised. "After the broadcast on Friday I'm never going to have

anything to do with radio again. I had no idea that it involved so much work and so many headaches."

Mr. Gordon chuckled. "All is not gold that glitters, eh? I'm glad you have discovered that radio people have to work hard." He switched on the overhead lights. "And yet, to the layman, the net result always seems so simple, doesn't it? Your program will be on the air and off it in a matter of minutes, and nobody listening will have the slightest idea that you had to do any hard work or suffered from even a slight headache."

Mrs. Gordon tucked her knitting away. "What your father is trying to say, Ginny, is that he has complete confidence in you. Don't worry, dear. Everything will go off smoothly. So run along and eat now."

Ginny did as she was told but she wasn't at all sure that things *would* go off smoothly on Friday. Everything depended on the letter which she hoped to receive tomorrow from Mr. O'Leary. If he wrote that Mr. Putnam could not appear, she and John would have to start all over again, a new book, a new author and maybe no panel at all! Or maybe they would be forced to end up with *Moonbeams* and a panel but no author. Two bad solutions; it was like being caught between the devil and the deep blue sea!



16 • UP IN THE AIR!

The next morning Ginny awoke a split second before her alarm clock was due to go off. She dressed hurriedly, ate a hasty breakfast, and had biked half of the way out to the Arnold mansion before seven-thirty.

"This is one time," she reflected grimly, "when Mrs. Arnold just can't talk on and on." Roll call in the home rooms was at eight-twenty. If you were late it meant a trip to the dean's office, and *that* often meant a session after school.

Tuesday was one day when Ginny could not afford to be kept after school. There was the four o'clock appointment with the photographer at Broadcast House for one thing. Even more important was the letter from Mr. Putnam's agent which she hoped the postman would be slipping under the door of the Stall at this very minute.

A light snow had fallen the night before and now, with the sun barely showing in the east, it was an ice-cruste slush which made biking difficult. Her tires skidded along the ruts in the old part of the road until she was finally forced to get off and walk the rest of the way. Walking in brand-new, rubber-soled moccasins proved to be even more difficult and Ginny began to feel panicky. If only she hadn't broken the crystal on her wrist watch the week before! If only she had had the money to have it repaired for a moment like this when time was truly of the essence!

Ginny's allowance had somehow dwindled away after the sale of secondhand books at the Stall. As she trudged along she tried to figure out where it had gone. Two long distance phone calls to Mr. O'Leary accounted for a large chunk of it. That, with stationery and stamps, explained why she didn't have a penny in her pocket right now and wouldn't receive another cent until Friday when her allowance was due.

Friday. Friday the twenty-fourth! It should have been Friday the thirteenth; then she would have been prepared for all of the ill omens which now hung over her head like a black cloud.

Suddenly Ginny laughed at herself. She was not only

crossing bridges ahead of time but she was woefully mixing metaphors. That was something her English teacher could not tolerate. Ginny had been sorely tempted to mix metaphors in her book report on *My Heart's in the City*. The author, Myra Swenson, had seemed to Ginny to be so woefully mixed up herself. To say about her novel that "the lady doth protest too much," had not been quite enough. Ginny had wanted to add, "She sounds to me like someone who is whistling in the dark. She says all these things about small-town people just to buoy up her courage, to strengthen her own convictions, because she doesn't honest-and-truly believe that small-town people *are* narrow-minded and petty and cruel."

By that time Ginny had reached the driveway to the Arnold mansion. Because of the huge evergreens which shielded it from the early morning sun, it was a solid sheet of unmelted icy snow. Ginny dropped the handlebars of her bike at the entrance and, "skiing" on her mocs, landed on the veranda steps a second later. She landed with such a thud that Mrs. Dakor opened the front door before Ginny had a chance to knock.

"Good land, Ginny," Joe's mother cried in amazement. "What brings you out here so early?"

Ginny grinned up at Mrs. Dakor and said, "I came out to see if Mrs. Arnold has finished a book which we loaned her last week. *Blue Moonbeams* by Wilcox Putnam."

"Land sakes!" The thin little woman helped Ginny to her feet and drew her inside. "Come in and get warm by the fire. Mrs. Arnold is there having a nice cup of tea."

"Indeed I am," Mrs. Arnold boomed. "Come in, Ginny. Come in."

Gratefully Ginny obeyed orders but before she even started to warm her numb fingers she said, "Oh, I'm so glad to see you, Mrs. Arnold. I hope you've finished the latest Wilcox Putnam novel which Whiz brought out to you on Wednesday. We just have to have *Blue Moonbeams* back in the Stall right away."

"I can understand that," the frail old lady replied. A lovely, lovely book. I simply couldn't put it down until I had finished it. And then I read it all over again. Mr. Putnam writes with such charm and dignity, and such maturity! His novel has everything which *My Heart's in the City* lacks. Miss Swenson must be a very young woman, don't you agree, Ginny? In fact I doubt if she is much older than you. Her novel is what my dear husband would have described as a tantrum. It is, of course, an autobiography,



and it is also obviously true that Miss Swenson had an unhappy childhood. Teen-age-hood, I should say. Reading between the lines, one can ascertain that she had a grand time until she went to high school. And then, just because—to use her own terminology—she ‘*didn’t* live across the tracks’—she was slighted.” Mrs. Arnold chuckled. “Exactly the reverse was true, of course. She was the one who did the slighting—thought she was too good for a small town. And now she’s ashamed of herself but she won’t admit it. One has to be as old as I am before one can cheerfully admit that one was wrong.”

She rambled on and on while Ginny stared vacantly up at the mantelpiece. Her subconscious mind told her that something was different there, although apparently the same old army of vases and knickknacks was marching across the black marble shelf above the fireplace. What had been changed? The two ancient Chinese mandarins seemed to nod and say, “Guess what? Guess what!”

Mrs. Arnold’s booming voice brought Ginny out of her reverie. “My dear child, please do me the kindness of listening when I am making an abject apology.”

“Yes’m,” Ginny said quickly.

Mrs. Arnold waved her lorgnette. “You were right and

I was wrong. As soon as I laid eyes on Ted Camden I knew instinctively that he was not a thief. They came out to call on me the other day—he and that pretty little Alicia Golden. Such an attractive young couple. I can't imagine why they don't fall in love with each other. But, the point is, I soon discovered that Ted knows no more about bibliopegy than Carson does. Illustrations are the only part of a book which interest young Ted; the binding means nothing. His father and grandfather would turn over in their graves if they knew."

Ginny stood up. "I have to go now, Mrs. Arnold. Is it all right if I take *Blue Moonbeams* back with me?"

Mrs. Arnold pointed with her cane. "It's right there in plain view on that marble-topped table, child. But before you go, please let me finish. I may have started out all wrong by suspecting Ted Camden, but I will say this in my own defense: I may not be as clever a detective as you are, but I now know who did walk off with my Lewis Carroll book. Can you say the same for yourself?"

"No," Ginny said, "but I'm beginning to suspect that the same person also walked off with our review copies of *Moonbeams*. I think that the person who took all five books did it just to be annoying. He or she is a trouble-

maker—somebody who is jealous because our Stall is such a success.”

Mrs. Arnold's shoulders shook with laughter. “You couldn't be more wrong, Ginny, dear. When you refer so mysteriously to missing review copies I have no idea what you are talking about, and I assure you that the person who walked off with *Rhyme? and Reason?* hasn't either.”

Ginny left then, thinking: “Well, at least Mrs. Arnold is happy because she thinks she's solved the mystery. I wish I could put my finger on what was different about her mantelpiece. I'm almost sure that a cloisonné vase is missing. Maybe Mrs. Arnold gave it to Lila and Joe for a wedding present.”

The warmth from the rising sun made biking back easier, but even so Ginny arrived at school just in time for roll call in her home room. During the lunch hour she biked furiously to the Stall hoping to find a letter from Timothy O'Leary waiting for her under the door. But there was nothing; not even a yellow slip stating that a special delivery letter was waiting for her at the post office. Ginny toyed with the idea of telephoning Mr. Putnam's agent but decided that Mr. O'Leary would be out to lunch then. Furthermore, not having a penny left out of her

allowance, she couldn't make a long distance call. She could, of course, borrow from the Stall's petty cash box, but that wouldn't be quite fair. And *that* reminded Ginny of something important. Since both she and John had to be at Broadcast House to pose for a picture at four o'clock, neither of them would be able to open up shop after school.

"I must give Chuck my set of keys right away," Ginny decided as she biked back to school. Fortunately she met him halfway up the steps and hastily thrust her key ring at him. "I should have done this ages ago, Chuck," she said. "You're the business manager; I'm not. The little key opens the petty cash box. The brass one opens the sidewalk windows and the big iron one opens the front door. Okay?" Without waiting for his reply, she dashed past him because the warning bell was ringing.

At 3:08, Ginny reported to her home room for roll call and dismissal. Then it occurred to her that she would have time to bike to the Stall before joining John and the others in front of Broadcast House. There just had to be a special delivery letter from Mr. O'Leary waiting for her at the Stall. There *had* to be.

But there wasn't. Chuck, having arrived in his jalopy

ahead of her, simply shook his head when she asked, "Any mail?"

So Ginny turned around and biked right off to Broadcast House. There another disappointment awaited her. John was standing out in front, alone, gazing raptly up at the tower as though his only interests lay in those thin silver fingers which stretched up to the sky.

Ginny skidded to a stop beside him. "Where is everybody?"

"We," he said, turning to face her, "are everybody. Nobody else could come. Band and Glee Club account for Nick and Sally. Bob had football practice and Jean, as a cheerleader—"

"Oh, no," Ginny moaned. "I forgot that our big game is tomorrow. For the first time in my life I seem to have forgotten all about football." Then she wished she had not spoken. John, because of a knee injury, had not been allowed to play football that year, and she knew it sometimes rankled in his soul. He had been captain of the freshman team and would have been captain of the sophomore team if it hadn't been for that skiing accident last winter. The handlebars of her bike slid through her fingers as she read the expression on his face.

John didn't want to pose for a picture now unless he could pose in football gear with the rest of the team. He was being a good sport to appear at all. The expression on his face said plainly:

"I hate all this, but I'd never let you down, Ginny."

Mr. Adrian and the news photographer appeared then, and while Ginny was explaining why there couldn't be a group picture, the photographer snapped John and herself in several poses with Mr. Adrian.

"What can't be helped, can't be helped," Mr. Adrian said. "I would have preferred a teen-age group but I do think Al got some good shots of the three of us." He added jovially, "We're the important three. After Mr. Putnam, of course. I trust, Ginny, that you've heard from his agent?"

Ginny shook her head mournfully. "I think I'd better telephone Mr. O'Leary right away. May I use the phone in your office, Mr. Adrian?"

Without bothering to reply, Mr. Adrian led the way inside. To the girl at the switchboard he said, "Please call Mr. Timothy O'Leary, authors' agent, with offices on East Forty-second Street, right away."

Ginny and John followed him into his office and almost immediately the phone rang. At a nod from Mr. Adrian,

Ginny picked it up. "Hello. This is Ginny Gordon calling. Could I speak to Mr. O'Leary, please?"

"Speaking," a deep masculine voice replied. "Oh, did you say Ginny Gordon? . . . Well, hi! Guess you got my letter. Sent it off special delivery to you yesterday."

"No," Ginny murmured. "I mean, yes. This is Ginny Gordon, but I didn't get your letter."

"No?" Mr. O'Leary sounded highly displeased. "I can't imagine why not. As a matter of fact, before I wrote I tried in vain to reach you by phone. I sure am sorry that Wilcox Putnam has another engagement for Friday night. Your program is just the kind he likes to appear on. And I, personally, am crazy about the whole idea. *Author Meets Teen-Age Critics!* Wow! It's a surefire honey. Why in the world didn't you get in touch with me sooner?"

"I—I c-couldn't," Ginny stammered. "Is it really and truly too late to get Mr. Putnam?"

Mr. O'Leary chuckled and there was something in that chuckle which made Ginny like him tremendously. He was obviously a very good sport. "Well, I dunno," he told Ginny. "If Wilk had seen the write-ups your program got in the big metropolitan papers this afternoon, I think he might have been persuaded to postpone his trip to Canada.

Sad part of it is that I picked up the first editions right after he boarded his plane."

"Oh." Ginny couldn't manage more than a dismal gasp of disappointment.

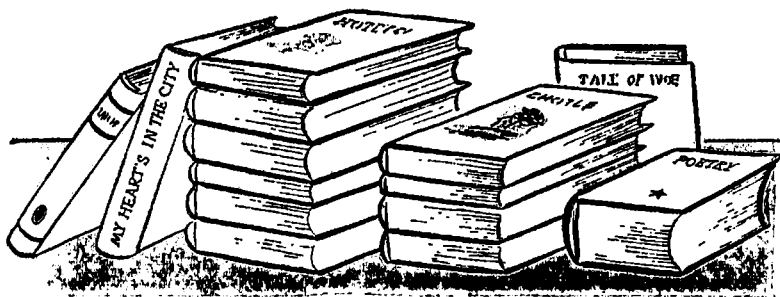
"Hey," he yelled at her, "let's never say die until we're buried ten feet under the ground. Wilk, fortunately, is still in the air. If it means that much to you, Ginny Gordon, I'll try to contact him somewhere en route before he gets into the north woods. Truthfully, his Friday night engagement is nothing but a get-together with his old cronies—rod and reel club members—that kind of thing. Wilk fancies himself as a great outdoorsman, but if he didn't have a smart agent like yours truly, he'd starve to death in the woods. When I was a kid living in a small town just like yours, I got along fine with a homemade fishing rod, but the most expensive equipment in the world is none too good for Lord Putnam." He chuckled again. "Authors. They're all nuts. For two cents, I'd quit and free-lance myself."

His voice was so cheery that Ginny couldn't help laughing. "I haven't got two cents," she said, "but I wish like anything that you *were* an author so you could be on our program. Have you by any chance written a book?"

"Not me," he yelled. "There's only one thing worse than an author and that's an authoress. But I tell you what, Ginny. Just because I was a crazy, enthusiastic kid like you not so long ago, I'll do my best not to let you down. If I can get hold of Wilk by phone I'll make him fly back. Bangor, Maine, is my best bet. As soon as I hear his yea or nay, I'll send you a wire."

A sharp click told Ginny that he had hastily hung up. "There's just a chance," she told Mr. Adrian. "Just a very small chance that Mr. Putnam may appear."

Mr. Adrian covered his face with his hands. "But, Ginny! We can't wait. You should have got a definite answer one way or the other. If Mr. Putnam can't appear we've got to try somebody else right away!"



17 • THE LAST STRAW

"Well," said John as they biked back to the Stall, "there *is* a chance that the telegram may arrive with good news before we close up shop this evening. But I wish you'd asked Mr. O'Leary to call you at home."

"To use one of your own expressions," Ginny said tartly, "let's not cry over spilled milk. Also, let's not cross any bridges until we come to them. Mr. O'Leary seemed so interested in our broadcast that I just feel in my bones he's going to persuade Mr. Putnam to come back."

John smiled down at her fondly. "Woman's intuition! But you may be right at that. So get to work on *Moonbeams* right away. You'll have to produce five copies of your report tomorrow so that the other kids and I can get going on it right after school. Thank goodness, the Thanksgiving holidays begin at noon!"

Ginny took *Moonbeams* from the desk where she had left it and asked Chuck, "Did you check this in as returned?"

He glared at her. "What do *you* think?"

"I don't want to think," Ginny retorted. "I want to *know*. And I'm not going to take this book out of here until I'm sure. Otherwise, you'll blame me if the card files aren't up-to-date."

"Run along, woman." John patted her shoulder soothingly. "Of course Chuck checked the book in. He's a wonderful business manager and you know it."

"Is that so?" Ginny tossed her chestnut curls. "Then why wasn't the book put back on the best-seller shelf? I didn't ask Chuck not to put it into circulation."

"Exactly." Chuck turned his back on her and said to John, "If I hadn't used my bean it would have been in circulation. The twins or Lucy had a perfect right to lend it to somebody if they saw it on the shelf."

Ginny tapped a toe impatiently. "Well, genius, please check the book *out* again. For your information I intend to keep it out until after the broadcast on Friday."

She spent the rest of the day at home reviewing the book and taking voluminous notes. Too late she remembered

that her typewriter was in the Stall. To go back for it would only invite sarcastic criticisms from Chuck, so she decided to get up early and type the five copies of the review there before school.

John stopped by shortly after Ginny reached that decision. "No telegram," he said. "But Mr. O'Leary may have sent you a night letter. It would arrive early tomorrow."

"I'll be in the Stall then," Ginny said and explained.

The next morning she arrived at the Stall at seven o'clock. The five copies were finished by eight and she clipped them to her original penciled notes and put the whole batch in the big middle drawer of the desk. No telegram had arrived by then so there was nothing for her to do but hurry off to school and mentally keep her fingers crossed.

Fortunately on a half-day before a vacation the teachers did not expect anyone to be particularly bright in class. In fact, it was all so dull that the morning dragged endlessly. Ginny envied the junior-high kids who were allowed to leave at ten o'clock. Whiz passed her in the corridor on his way out and said:

"How about giving me the keys to the Stall? A lot of people on our lists want stuff to read during the holidays. And in case you think we're going to do any work after

today until next Monday, you're crazy."

Ginny handed him John's key ring. "Be sure to lock up when you leave," she ordered.

"Then how'll you get in?" he demanded.

"Chuck has another set," she explained. "He'll get there before John and I can leave. Juniors and seniors who got high marks on their report cards are going to be dismissed at eleven—the lucky ducks!"

Finally, after what seemed like days, the last bell rang. Ginny met Lucy in the locker room and they hurried off for the Stall together.

"I didn't do a thing this morning," Lucy admitted, "but think about the big Thanksgiving dinner we're going to have tomorrow. Is it all right if I eat now? You can go out for lunch when I'm through. I'll just grab a sandwich and a malted. That won't take long."

"Suits me," Ginny said. "I won't be able to eat until I know one way or the other about Mr. Putnam. Oh, Lucy! Suppose he can't come?"

"I wouldn't worry," Lucy said disinterestedly. "Mr. Adrian will surely be able to produce somebody at the last minute. After all, that's his job as the program director."

"Not in this case, it isn't," Ginny said bitterly. "Have

you been reading the papers lately? Every single one in the whole state has headlined the fact that this is strictly a teenage project."

Lucy giggled. "The only paper I read is the *Harristown News* and I haven't had time lately to read it. Well, 'by and good luck."

Because it had looked as though it would surely snow that morning, Ginny had left her bike in the garage at home. A few big squashy flakes were falling as she ran the rest of the way to the Stall.

"Oh, Chuck," she gasped, "did the telegram arrive?"

He finished stamping some cards, then, without looking up, said, "No telegram arrived while I was here."

"Well, thanks for your interest," Ginny said sarcastically. "You and Lucy frankly give me a pain. Neither one of you cares whether we go on the air or not."

He stood up. "Since you always seem to be *up* in the air I doubt if you ever will go *on* the air." He shrugged into his trench coat. "I have a luncheon date, so I trust you won't mind if I depart now. Due to your stupidity, the twins made a fine mess of things around here. It never occurred to them to change the date on the rubber stamp from yesterday to today." Just before he closed the door he added,

almost venomously, Ginny thought: "Will you ever learn not to turn over the keys to irresponsible junior-high kids?"

Ginny sank down in the chair behind the desk. She knew that he was right. If she hadn't been so worried about that telegram she would never have given Whiz a set of keys. That had been a mistake but Chuck needn't have been so disagreeable about it. One day's difference on the date stamp wasn't going to do any great harm, especially since they had planned all along to close up shop for the holidays. The important thing was that telegram. Why hadn't Mr. Timothy O'Leary kept his promise? Right this very minute she should be at Broadcast House giving Mr. Adrian a definite answer. Was Mr. Putnam going to appear, or wasn't he? If not, who was going to be the guest?

John came in then, followed by the four panel members. John took one look at her face and said, "No telegram! Well, we'll just have to go ahead on the premise that Mr. Putnam *will* be the guest. Pass out the book reviews, Ginny."

Ginny yanked open the middle drawer of the desk. Besides an assortment of rusty paper clips, old, tired rubber bands, stubby pencils, tidbit-size erasers, a small memo pad, and some blank filing cards, there was nothing except

a soiled, battered envelope. The very sight of it infuriated Ginny and she pushed it way back inside the drawer out of her sight. Where were those neatly typed book reports which she had slaved over?

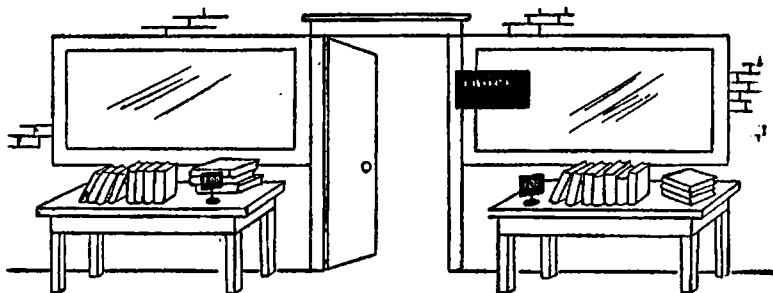
"Make it snappy," Nick said.

"I'm in an awful hurry," Jean and Sally said in one voice.

"Quit stalling." Bob, the senior-high boy, looked very annoyed. "If you didn't get around to making those reports last night, Ginny, say so. Just quit stalling."

John moved protectively around the desk to stand behind Ginny. "She made the reports, fella. So hold your horses. Where are they, Ginny?"

Ginny clutched her curls with both hands. "I don't know," she wailed. "I clipped them carefully together and put them in this drawer at eight o'clock this morning. What could have happened to them, John? What *could* have happened to them?"



18 • THE MISSING TELEGRAM

"Well, that does it," Bob said disgustedly. "No author, no books, not even a synopsis to work from. I quit." He strode out into the snowy street.

"Same here," said Nick. "I should waste my precious vacation on thin air!" He slammed the door behind him.

The girls moved closer to the desk. "I'm awfully sorry, Ginny," Sally said. "I hate to let you down. If you'll give me a copy of the book I'll—"

"Well, I won't," Jean interrupted decisively. "There just isn't time between now and Friday to read any book intelligently."

John grinned and waved his hands above Jean's head. "Down, girl! We'll find Ginny's reviews if you'll just give us time. They've been mislaid, that's all."

Jean relented. "Well, okay. But I'm going home for

lunch now. If you find 'em, bring me my copy right away." She and Sally departed, letting in a gust of snowy air that made the Day Sheet on top of the desk billow.

"Maybe that's the answer," John said. "Maybe you left the book reviews on the desk, Ginny, and they got blown off." He stooped and immediately straightened. "Nothing on the floor. Not even a scrap for a change."

Ginny hastily opened the side drawers of the desk and scrabbled through them. "Not that they could possibly be in here," she told John. "These drawers are too narrow, and what with the various partitions, nobody in his right mind would have tried to cram those reports into any one of them."

Watching her search, John said, "Somebody might have folded your reports, Ginny. But who? Chuck wouldn't be so dumb and he's the only person who's been in the Stall since you finished typing this morning."

Ginny sighed. "The twins were here earlier," she said, and explained.

John shook his head. "Whiz would never have touched that batch you clipped together on pain of death. He acts like a clown but he's far from stupid. One glance would have told him that those typewritten pages represented a

lot of hard work. Whiz has a very healthy respect for the results of hard work."

"Well, Babs hasn't," Ginny complained unfairly and untruthfully. "She's never done any real hard work in her whole life! She wouldn't have the vaguest idea of how difficult it is to type neatly and make carbons. She probably used the backs of those sheets of paper to write memos to Chuck on—concerning the books she took out, I mean. In that case, after he transferred the facts to the card files he would have tossed the memos into the scrap basket."

With the toe of one moccasin, Ginny brought the waste paper basket closer to her and peered into it. It was empty except for some ragged scraps. Listlessly, Ginny picked them up, and then she uttered a faint scream.

"Look, John! Here's what's left of that missing special delivery letter!"

Sure enough, when they had pieced the scraps together, there it was, complete with the sealed envelope. Mr. O'Leary had written a very warm, friendly letter immediately upon receipt of Ginny's query. In closing he had said:

You sound like a grand bunch of kids and I wish that I could oblige. In my stable I've got a lot of other

good prospects for your teen-age show. All of them would love to appear. So try me again, please.

"What a swell guy!" John said. "But who on earth could have torn up that letter?"

"I strongly suspect Chuck," Ginny began but John interrupted:

"Don't be an idiot! Remember what pains he took yesterday to preserve our only copy of *Moonbeams*. If he had wanted to play mean tricks on you, Ginny, that would have been his golden opportunity."

Ginny gasped. "This morning I brought our only copy of *Moonbeams* to the Stall along with my penciled notes. I needed it to make sure that I'd spelled all of the proper nouns correctly in the copies of my review. Not that spelling matters on the radio, but you know Bob and Jean! They'd never let me hear the end of it if I'd made any mistakes in spelling. So before I left the Stall early this morning I checked everything, and I left our rental copy of *Moonbeams* right here on the desk."

John folded himself into the extra chair beside the desk. "Well, now we *are* left high and dry. The twins probably loaned it to someone. I give up!"

"Well, I don't." Ginny moved out from behind the desk. "The missing letter from Mr. O'Leary was here all the time, so I'll bet that the four review copies are here, too. Whoever tore up that letter must have hidden those copies." She began yanking novels out of the whodunit shelf. "Help me, John. Look behind the best-sellers."

They worked together in silence for a few minutes and then Ginny shouted, "Just as I thought. Here they are, John! Somebody neatly tucked them behind the historical novels!"

John helped her lift them out, shaking his head. "I still don't get it. Who in the world could be behind all of these mysterious happenings, Ginny? Do you suppose that the same person swiped 'R and R'?"

Ginny collapsed on the floor, cradling the missing copies of *Moonbeams* in her arms. "I'll keep my suspicions to myself. Let's not waste any more time guessing. Take these books to the members of our panel right away."

John hesitated. "Maybe reviewing *Moonbeams* will turn out to be the biggest waste of time. Do you remember exactly what Mr. O'Leary said over the phone to you yesterday, Ginny? Think hard. Maybe he said, 'I'll wire you if I can persuade Mr. Putnam to appear on the broadcast.'



In that case, no news is bad news, and we'd better try to get hold of another author right away."

"No, no, a thousand times no," Ginny cried. "I remember exactly what Mr. O'Leary said. He distinctly said, 'As soon as I hear his yea or nay, I'll send you a wire.' That wire should have arrived yesterday, John—and at the latest, this morning. I frankly think it did arrive, but—"

At that moment Lucy came back with Chuck on her heels. Ginny was pretty sure then that they had arranged to have lunch together at the Grill. It was maddening to know that your best friend was crazy about your worst enemy!

She scrambled to her feet and dumped the review copies of *Moonbeams* into John's reluctant arms. "Go," she muttered. "I'll cope from this end."

The moment John left, she turned on Chuck. "Did you by any chance take from the middle drawer of the desk some typewritten sheets of paper?"

He ignored her and said to Lucy, "Will you tell your friend that I don't know what she's talking about? But in case she's interested, a weird old man *was* hovering around the desk this morning. He came in shortly before the noon whistle blew and said he was a member. Looked like some-

body who'd been left behind after a kindergarten Christmas play . . . long, gray-white hair and an untidy white beard. I had to go outside for a minute while he was hovering—or maybe you could call it browsing. Anyway, he left right after that, and I made sure that he didn't take any of our stock with him. He was wearing such thin, shabby clothes that I would have known if he had a book under his coat."

"The hermit!" Lucy clapped her hands over her mouth and, to Ginny's complete bewilderment, raced out into the snow.

Ginny glared at Chuck. "Yes, the hermit, who, in case you're interested, is a member in good standing. *Very* good standing since he happens to be Dr. Lloyd Forrester, Ph.D. Are you trying to tell me that he swiped my typewritten reviews of *Moonbeams*?"

Chuck shrugged. "All I'm saying is that he hovered and that he didn't depart with a book. He could, of course, have secreted sheets of paper in his sleeves and pockets."

"Well, maybe you can answer this one," Ginny exploded. "How do you suppose that the four review copies of *Moonbeams* got neatly tucked behind the historical novels?"

"Were they?" He shrugged again. "If you can't remem-

ber putting them there I guess nobody else can. If you plan to eat lunch you'd better go now because I'm planning to leave early today. We can't expect any business the day before Thanksgiving."

"That shows how stupid you are," Ginny retorted. "We're always extra busy on Wednesday afternoons because so many of the stores are closed then. And the fact that we do plan to be closed all during the holidays means that we'll be busier than usual. But leave now, if you like. See if I care!"

He hesitated. "I'd feel better if you went out for lunch first. Sure you don't want to?"

There was something in his tone of voice which made Ginny turn and glance at him. He had spoken almost kindly, but his back was turned toward her so she decided that she must have been mistaken. "I'm not hungry," she said and he went out into the snow without another word.

Five minutes later Whiz barged in, bringing a lot of snow with him. "It's a lizzard," he said. "If it keeps up the big game tomorrow will have to be postponed."

"Blizzard," Ginny corrected him absent-mindedly.

"Lizzard," he repeated. "That's what Babs called 'em when she was a baby and the name has stuck." He yanked

some books from under his mackinaw and slammed them on the desk. "Returns. And I'm through until next Monday. Any objections?"

"Yes," Ginny said sharply. "Did you or Babs lend our only copy of *Moonbeams* to anybody?"

He shook his head vehemently. "So far as I know Mrs. Arnold still has it."

Ginny stood up. "Did you or Babs by any chance tuck the review copies of it behind the books on the historical novels shelf?"

Whiz whistled shrilly. "For Pete's sake, this is where I came in. John cross-examined me on Monday evening. The answer is still NO! Babs and I never saw the review copies." He started for the door but Ginny stopped him.

"Just a minute. Did you or Babs take anything—anything at all—out of the middle desk drawer this morning?"

"Never touched it," he retorted, "and neither did Babs. All we did at the desk was stamp the books we took out and make a list of them on the Day Sheet for Chuck's records. Gleeps, that guy is sure fussy."

"Never mind," Ginny interrupted. "One more question. I found that missing letter. Someone had torn it up, unopened, and tossed it into the scrap basket. Know any-

thing about how that happened?"

Instead of replying he said, "That reminds me. Did the telegram bring good news?"

Ginny jumped, and felt as though she had jumped right out of her skin. "What telegram?"

He stared at her. "Why, the one that arrived this morning right after Babs and I opened shop. It was delivered late yesterday by mistake to Shoemaker's book department. It took the moron salesgirl until ten this a.m. to figure out that it belonged to you, so she dispatched an errand boy with it pronto. I—"

"Skip the details," Ginny blurted. "What did you do with it? Tear it up and throw it away?"

Whiz drew himself up to his full height. "Listen, prima donna, I gather from John that being Queen of the Air has caused you a lot of headaches, and I feel so sorry for you that I'm willing to overlook most of your caustic remarks. But get this straight, telegrams in my book are important. So I put it in a good safe place. A place where you would be sure to see it right off."

"Where?" Ginny asked feebly.

"In the roller of your typewriter," he replied smugly. "Half-in and half-out so you couldn't miss it."

"But I did," Ginny told him, "because it wasn't there when I arrived and it still isn't. Look for yourself."

Whiz shrugged. "Don't blame me, blame Chuck. He's so systematic he probably filed it. I advise you to look through the cards under the T's. T for tidy or T for telegram; you can't miss either way." He yanked open the door and again the Day Sheet buckled. He slammed the door and this time the Day Sheet, as though in protest, burst loose at the bottom corners from the thumb tacks which attached it to the big green desk blotter. And then Ginny saw something which made her eyes bug open with surprise.

Underneath the Day Sheet was a yellow envelope. She didn't need to look twice to know that it was the missing telegram!



19 • ALICIA CONFESSES

Ginny tore open the yellow envelope and read the message:

SORRY NO SOAP STOP BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME STOP
LUCK AND LOVE

TIM O'LEARY

John came in then and Ginny wordlessly handed him the telegram. He glanced at it and said, "Well, that's that. At least we're not up in the air any more."

"Yes, but can we go *on* the air?" Ginny cried.

"We have to," John said mildly. "This thing has received so much publicity that we'll have to carry on even if we don't have a guest author."

Ginny gasped. "You mean—you and I and the panel discuss the book and let it go at that?"

"Can you suggest a better solution at this late date?" John asked.

Ginny got out a strangled sob. "It'll be a flop, John, a total and complete flop!"

"Not necessarily," he said easily. "I'll go right over to Broadcast House and discuss our problem with Mr. Adrian. He may have a better suggestion."

He left so hurriedly that he didn't notice when the tail of his trench coat brushed the bookkeeping ledger off the low shelf beside the desk. Ginny mechanically moved over to pick it up and then she stopped in amazement. Several sheets of paper had been spilled out from between the covers of the ledger. They were neatly typewritten pages and one glance at them made her yell, "My missing book reviews!"

John, with his hand on the doorknob, turned around. "So?" he asked quizzically. "You certainly did put them in a safe place! How could you have forgotten, Ginny?"

That was too much. Ginny let go of all of her pent-up emotions in a steady stream of words. "I didn't put the book reports in the ledger. I didn't put the telegram underneath the Day Sheet. I didn't stick the review copies of *Moonbeams* behind the books on the historical novels shelf. I didn't tear up the special delivery letter from Mr. O'Leary

and toss it into the scrap basket. I didn't get the message Mr. Adrian left here for me on Friday. If I had, I would have gotten in touch with him right away and we would probably have decided to contact another author then and there. I didn't swipe 'R and R' either, or lose it, or sell it. And I'm sick and tired of getting the blame for everything that's gone wrong around here. Instead of getting help, all I got was hindrance from the moment I started to make plans for the broadcast. Hindrance and frowns of disapproval and wisecracks, until you finally broke down and offered to help me. But the twins and Lucy—Lucy, my very best friend—not one of them has—”

“Whoa!” John reached out to sandwich both of her flailing hands between his. “Calm down, Ginny. Things *have* been rugged for you, but the truth is that if 'R and R' hadn't disappeared so mysteriously, you would have had a lot more cooperation from the rest of us so far as the broadcast is concerned. We all felt that finding it was the most important item on the agenda.”

Ginny tried to jerk away, but he held her hands more tightly. “Listen. The twins and Lucy think they've solved the 'R and R' mystery, so from now on they'll be free to help you. As a matter of fact, Whiz told me last night that he

was ashamed of himself for having kidded you—called you Queen of the Air and that sort of thing. They'd all like to help now, but frankly, what can they do?"

A gust of wind from the entrance told them that somebody was opening the door. Ginny whirled and saw that Chuck was coming in. His cap and shoulders were white with snow, but his face was even whiter.

"Look, Ginny," he began, "—and John. I've got a confession to make. I thought I could go away for the holidays and forget about the mess Ginny's in, but when I went home to pack, I found that I couldn't forget. There is a way out of the scrape you're in, Ginny. A very easy way, and it's the best possible answer."

Ginny stared at him in amazement. "Wha-at?" was all she could get out.

"In a way," he continued, "it's insulting your intelligence to give you the solution. If you hadn't been so busy for the past couple of weeks you would have figured it out for yourself. The answer is, of course, forget all about *Moonbeams* and Mr. Wilcox Putnam. The obvious book for you to review over the air is *My Heart's in the City*."

Ginny let out a little, muffled shriek. "It would be perfect in every way, naturally, but how in the world can I get

hold of the author at this late date?"

Chuck grinned and Ginny decided that he *was* a very handsome boy after all. "Silly," he said, not unkindly. "If you stopped to think you'd realize that you could get hold of her in about ten minutes. And since she happens to think that you're just about perfect, I doubt if she'd refuse to be your guest, even though it amounts to a second-choice invitation."

Ginny's brown eyes were now as large as saucers. "Chuck," she sort of choked. "You don't mean that Alicia Golden is Myra Swenson?"

He chuckled. "I don't know for sure, but I strongly suspect that Myra Swenson is Alicia's pen name. I suspected it from the very moment that she and I discussed *My Heart's in the City*. At first she went overboard in defense of it, but as soon as she realized that I thoroughly sympathized with her teen-age heroine's problems, she did a right-about-face. Tore the book to shreds, accused me of being a fool who went around with a chip on his shoulder simply because he—I—used to be a big frog in a little pond and when I came here I was cut down to tadpole size."

John clapped him on his snowy shoulder. "That could never happen, fella. Sticking to aquatic metaphors, the only

trouble with you, Chuck, was that you felt like a fish out of water at first. But a tadpole—never!”

Tense as she was with suppressed excitement, Ginny found herself laughing with the boys. “I think you’re a whale of a guy,” she gurgled. “And I’m sure you’re right about Alicia. Looking back now, I can remember a dozen things she said which should have made me know that she wrote *My Heart’s in the City*.”

“Me, too!” John exclaimed. He helped Ginny into her slicker and handed her the waterproof scarf which she hastily tied around her curls. “Get right over to the Inn, Ginny, and see what you can do. In the meantime I’ll contact Mr. Adrian and the panel members.”

Five minutes later Ginny was seated on Alicia’s sofa in the alcove of her lovely big room at the Inn, but she was too breathless to speak.

“Good heavens!” Alicia cried. “Only one thing could make you so excited, Ginny! You’ve unearthed that missing book! Was it where Lucy and Babs think it was?”

Ginny shook her head. “I didn’t come here to talk to you about that book, Alicia,” she said between gasps. “It’s *My Heart’s in the City*. Oh, Alicia, you *did* write it, didn’t you, and you *are* Myra Swenson, aren’t you?”

For answer, Alicia jumped up. "Oh, your slicker is dripping all over the rug. I'd better hang it on the shower rack in the bathroom." When she came back a minute later her cheeks were very pink and her eyes were sparkling. "Well, yes, Ginny," she said, giggling. "I am Myra Swenson, or rather, it's the other way 'round. I did let the cat out of the bag a dozen times, didn't I? Not that I really wanted to deceive you or anybody, but you see, Ginny, when I came up here all of a sudden, I did it because I was running away from someone. I knew he'd never, never think of looking for me in a small town so I registered here under my own name. If I'd used my pen name, something might have appeared in the papers and then he could have found me." She sank down on the hassock at Ginny's feet and the dimples fled from her face. "Maybe he never even tried to find me. Maybe he doesn't love me any more. And I don't blame him. He wanted me to marry him and live in a perfectly lovely home about ten miles north of here. But I flatly refused. I mean, I said I'd marry him, because I really and truly love him more than anybody else in the world, Ginny. But I didn't want to live in the country, especially not in Westchester where I had such an unhappy teen-age-hood. So we quarreled bitterly.

He's got red hair and a fiendish temper and he's frightfully bossy. He's my agent, you see, and just because he got my first book published he thinks he owns me. . . . "

She rambled on while Ginny tried hard not to smile. One mystery was solved. Now she knew why Alicia had torn up that letter to Timothy O'Leary. Tim O'Leary was Alicia's agent, too.

"Oh, I was *so* wrong," Alicia was declaiming. "Living here in Harristown has taught me that I do love living in the country. You and your friends have been such fun, Ginny. When you first told me about them and how wonderful everybody here is to teen-agers, I just couldn't believe you. Things were very, very different in my own home town, but I realize now that it was my own fault. If I had had your courage, I would have gone ahead and done things the way you do even when people tell you that you've bitten off more than you can chew. I just can't begin to tell you how much I admire you, Ginny. Knowing you has changed my whole life. I don't ever plan to go back to that silly garden apartment in Greenwich Village. Ugh! Who wants a back yard when you can have acres and acres of beautiful land with a view of the Hudson—?" She stopped to catch her breath and Ginny said quickly:

"Alicia, I have a big favor to ask of you. And I'll understand if your answer is no, because, of course, it will mean a tremendous amount of publicity. Everybody in the whole state will know that you're living here at the Inn. But I'm going to ask you anyway because I honestly don't think you want to hide from Tim—Mr. O'Leary—any longer, anyway. Will you be our guest on the radio Friday night?"

Alicia jumped up, clapping her hands. "Oh, Ginny, of course I will. What fun! I'd love it." She tossed her blond curls. "And as for Tim, he won't know a thing about it. As of this minute, he's basking in front of the fire in his country home. I know that young man's habits. He closed shop at noon today and he won't return until Monday morning." Suddenly she blushed. "Oh, you guessed my secret! Now you can understand why I tore up that letter you wrote to Tim about Wilcox Putnam. I thought at first that you'd been spying on me and were going to tell him that I was living here." She frowned, bowing her head in shame. "I have a confession to make to you, Ginny. When I typed a fresh copy of that letter last Saturday, I realized how important it was for you to get in touch with Tim right away. I could have told you how to get hold of him that minute because he naturally spends week ends in the

country and he's listed in the Westchester directory. But I couldn't figure out how to tell you that without letting the cat out of the bag." She held out her slim arms, pleading, "You will forgive me, won't you? I've been punished enough for my sins. Oh, I can't tell you how miserable it makes me feel when I see people all around me who are as madly in love as Carson and Betty, and Lila and Joe are. And there are you darling teen-agers—you and John and Lucy and Chuck. If I had any sense I'd rent a car right away and drive up to Tim's home and join him there by the fire and tell him what an idiot I am." She collapsed on the hassock and burst into tears.

Ginny tried to say something comforting but Alicia seemed to have forgotten her. So Ginny retrieved her slicker and hurried out. Downstairs in the lobby she grabbed the first available public phone and telephoned Mr. Adrian.

"Great!" he cried when he heard the news. "It couldn't be better, Ginny! John just dropped by to give me a hint and I've started the ball a-rolling. The publicity will be tremendous and, with such a controversial book, the dialogue on the air is bound to be terrific! Some of you kids may be crazy about the novel; others may detest it. Fortunately, your father has a publicity shot of Miss Swenson

and he said I could borrow it. I'll use it with the group we took yesterday. The whole idea is out of this world. Small-town girl who hates small towns and writes a book about it and then decides to spend her vacation in a small town—wow!” He hung up.

Ginny wandered out into the snow feeling that the ball which Mr. Adrian had started a-rolling might snowball into something too large for her to cope with. An unusual amount of last-minute publicity would mean that a great many people would be listening in on Friday evening. If she botched things, the whole of New York would know about it!

“Oh, why do I get myself into these things?” Ginny moaned silently, and the wind seemed to pick up her words. “Why-oh-who—” it moaned, and all of a sudden Ginny realized that Harristown was indeed in the midst of a blizzard.



20 • "WHAT I OWE YOU"

For a moment Ginny was frightened. It was as dark now as it usually was around five-thirty in the afternoon. The slanting sheets of snow formed a veil over the light from the street lamps. She arrived safely at the Stall only because she knew the route so well that she could have traveled over it blindfolded. Chuck was there working at the desk, and he stood up when she came in, something he had never done before.

"Luck?" he asked.

"Terrific luck," she replied. "And we owe it all to you, Chuck. Which reminds me that I'd better apologize to you for my evil thoughts. I've been blaming you for all of the mysterious things which have been happening around here. All I can say in my own defense is that I did pretty much keep my thoughts to myself. But I'd feel better if you'd

forgive me for even thinking them."

He stared up at the ceiling, then blurted: "You were right to blame me, Ginny. I *am* responsible for everything that went wrong, and I feel like such a heel that I think I'll go outside and kick myself around the block. I was jealous of you from the moment I entered high—your popularity, your executive ability, your courage in all sorts of enterprises. It burned me up that a mere girl, and a freshman at that, seemed to have every little thing including both brains and beauty. Then when the emcee job came up, Uncle Hu gave it to you instead of to me. That finished me, and I mapped out a campaign to make sure that you'd be a flop. You played right into my hands when you asked me to help you out here in the Stall."

Ginny dumped her slicker on the floor and perched on a corner of the desk. "I do understand, Chuck," she said softly. "You don't have to apologize for anything. You more than made amends when you told me that Alicia is Myra Swenson. I'll probably die of stage fright at the last minute, but with her gift of gab the show is sure to be a success." She held out her hand. "Let's let bygones be bygones, Chuck. . . . Now that you know what a dope I am you couldn't possibly be jealous of me any more. And I do

hope that you eventually decide to become a permanent member of the Hustlers.”

He touched her fingers lightly and turned away. “I don’t deserve to be forgiven. What made me belatedly realize what a heel I am was this, believe it or not: You handed over the keys to the Stall to me without any qualifications. In the very beginning you turned over the files to me. But it didn’t dawn on me until this afternoon while I was packing what all that meant. It meant that you trusted me implicitly—my honor and my integrity, and I let you down every step of the way. I destroyed the note Uncle Hu left for you on Friday. I hid the review copies of *Moonbeams*. Also the telegram and your book reviews. I tore up the special delivery letter from the agent. I pretended to be cooperative—a red herring—when I carefully didn’t let anybody take out our only copy of *Moonbeams* on Saturday, but I loaned it to somebody myself today, just to be mean. That’s the truth, Ginny. Everything I did was just to be mean. It was petty and small of me, but I’m not really like that. If you knew some of the kids in my own home town, they’d tell you—” He interrupted himself with a laugh. “How dumb can I get? Harristown *is* my own home town now. I realized that when I was getting ready

to go back and visit my best friend at Cottersville. I didn't really want to go back, and I'm not going to. I just want to know that you and the other Hustlers will be willing to forget my crimes."

Ginny laughed. "So far as I am concerned they were never committed, and I don't think anybody else ever suspected you in the slightest, Chuck. Lucy and the twins have only been interested in the major crime: Who swiped *Rhyme? and Reason?* I never did seriously suspect you of that one. You were here at the opening day of the sale when your uncle first talked to Miss Slater about the program, so I guess you should have been Suspect Number One on my list." She laughed. "But I was right not to suspect you." He said nothing and she added, surprised, "Wasn't I?"

John came in then, stamping snow from his feet. "We're licked. I did my best, but every single member of the panel has quit. They flatly refused to switch books at this late date, and what with the big game tomorrow, I can't say that I blame them."

"Oh *no*," Ginny wailed. "The game will probably be postponed until Saturday."

"I pointed out that possibility to them," John told her,

"to no avail. They washed their hands of the whole deal."

"Well, good riddance to bad rubbish," Ginny exploded. "If they're that selfish and inconsiderate they wouldn't be any good on the program anyway. In the very beginning Mr. Adrian explained to me the importance that psychology—"

"Exactly," Chuck broke in. "So you have no troubles, Ginny. You've had a perfect panel all the time right under your nose in this very Stall. John and Lucy from senior high and the Reilly twins from junior high. They've all read Alicia's book—practically know it by heart. Most important, they're all well-balanced kids. Self-sufficient but not selfish, so none of them will hog the mike. Good sports, so they won't let you down. Intelligent, too, so their questions and answers will be brief and to the point. And, best of all probably, you can rely on Whiz to be your comedian whenever you need a laugh."

Ginny's mouth fell open with surprise. "I thought you despised the twins, especially Whiz."

"Not me." He chuckled. "Remember how he stood up to me the other day? I was terribly impressed, because after all I am three years older and a lot bigger. You've known all along how much I admire Lucy and John, and as for

Babs, she's such a perfect example of what a girl her age should be that she'll be a wow on the air."

John coughed. "It's pleasant to be around when compliments are being dished out, Chuck, and I thank you for the kind words. But you've forgotten one thing. There's been a great deal of publicity about my being Ginny's co-emcee, so I can't be on the panel."

"That's right," Ginny interrupted, "but Chuck can. Oh, Chuck, please say you will. *Please!*"

He bowed. "Anything to oblige. Sure you want me?"

"Sure as sure," Ginny replied. "We need your experience terribly, for one thing. Oh, let's close up shop and have a rehearsal right away! Could we have it at Broadcast House, Chuck?"

He started for the door. "I'll go ask Uncle Hu right now, but I'm so sure that it can be arranged that let's say we'll all meet there in an hour."

"I'll round up the others," John offered, and followed him into the snowstorm.

Ginny began to tidy up the Stall. Although she hadn't had any lunch she was too excited to be hungry. She opened the middle desk drawer to get out the keys and then she saw that soiled, battered envelope. When she had

been frantically searching for her book reviews she had ignored it, but now it aroused her curiosity. So she opened it, and almost fell off the chair with surprise. It contained five crisp one hundred dollar bills! Clipped to them was a scrap of paper on which someone had written in an old-fashioned spidery scrawl: "This is what I owe you."

Now Ginny was consumed with curiosity. Who had written those words? There could be only one answer: The person who had taken *Rhyme? and Reason?* out of the Stall.

"Just as I thought," she cried exultantly. "It was sold by mistake and the person who bought it realized later how valuable it was." But that didn't make sense. The book was only valuable to a collector, and a collector would have known all along how valuable the book was. He or she would have offered to pay a fair price for it in the very beginning; or, having managed to buy it for a song, would have smugly kept it, thanking his lucky stars.

The bank would be closed until Friday morning so Ginny locked the money in the cash box and locked the box in the bottom drawer of the desk. Then she donned her scarf and slicker and locked herself out of the Stall.

It had stopped snowing now, and she crunched along the

sidewalk, grateful for the thick rubber soles of her moccasins. As she passed the Grill on Main Street she decided she had better have a bite to eat before the rehearsal. While waiting in a booth for her sandwich she tried not to think about the "R and R" mystery. But her thoughts kept wandering back to it. Was Chuck the culprit after all? One glance at the exquisite blue leather binding might have told him that it was very valuable. Had he wandered off with it in his pocket during the sale when he learned that his uncle was going to ask Ginny, not him, to emcee the program? Had he sold it out of spite, and then later, ashamed of himself, put the money in the desk drawer? It all made sense except for the old-fashioned handwriting on the note. Surely, somebody old enough to be Chuck's grandfather had written those words. And if Chuck had wanted to remain anonymous, it would have been so easy for him to type, "This is what I owe you." And that soiled envelope didn't fit in with Chuck's tidy habits at all. Leaving that much money around in an unlocked drawer didn't fit in either.

Ginny finished her sandwich and hot chocolate and said to the waitress, "I won't be able to pay you until I get my allowance on Friday. Is that all right?"



"Perfectly all right," replied the friendly woman. "My, Ginny, you're really famous now! I can't wait to tune in on your program. The boss is going to have our radio blaring all the time. I guess everybody in town feels the same way—we're that proud of you!"

Ginny smiled and hurried out. Across the street was Shoemaker's Department Store, and that reminded her again of how important it was for the broadcast to be a success. Mr. Shoemaker's radio wouldn't be tuned in because he would be right there at the station in the control room; at least, that's what Mr. Adrian had implied when he first discussed the show.

Chuck promptly confirmed this when they met at Broadcast House a few minutes later. "Uncle Hu couldn't hang around," he told Ginny, "but he said I should show you the ropes. When the others get here, we'll start out with the control room. That's where the special guests will be watching. You'll be able to see them through the glass panel, Ginny. They can hear you but you can't hear them. So try to forget that they're there. The important thing is for you to watch the engineer's signals."

John arrived then with Lucy and the twins. Lucy and Babs cried in one breath:

"Oh, it's so exciting, I can't bear it." They hugged Ginny, one on each side. "Do you really want us? Honestly and truly? Suppose we die of stage fright just before we go on the air?"

Whiz snorted. "It would be much worse if you died right *after* we went on the air. Your corpses wouldn't bother anyone—it's the dead air you'd create which would be ghastly."

"That's right," Chuck agreed. "Unlike TV, what the audience can't see won't hurt them. So it won't matter if we all look horrible. But here's something you gals might like to know about. Don't wear any jingle-jangle bracelets. They can be heard through the mike when you move your hands."

"I don't intend to move at all," Lucy retorted. "I just know I'll be frozen with fright."

"I haven't got any bracelets," Babs put in. "But I do have the cards I used when I gave an oral book review of *My Heart's in the City* for school. Can't I bring them along, Chuck?"

"We-ell, yes," he said. "But try to forget about them when you go on the air. Reading anything, even notes, is apt to make your dialogue sound stilted—rehearsed. And

shuffling through a pack of cards can be heard. Ginny and John, as emcees, will of course have several sheets of paper on the table in front of them which they'll refer to throughout the broadcast. But they won't noisily riffle through them. As soon as they've finished with a memo sheet, they'll slide it down onto the floor."

"I'll probably slide down under the table with the very first sheet," Ginny said. "Oh, Chuck, I wish you were going on in my place."

"You'll be wonderful," he assured her. "Even the most professional professional is scared to death just before he or she goes on the air. But that's a good sign. It means you're all pepped up—going to give everything you've got to the show. Come on upstairs. Once you get the lay of the land you'll feel more relaxed."

They followed him up in an awed silence. "Over there is the news room," he said when they all emerged into the hall. "Through the glass partition in the door you can see the broadcaster and the machines which keep feeding the latest news to him."

"UP and AP," Ginny said. "Syndicated news releases just like the ones which keep pouring out of the machines in Dad's city room at the *News*."

Chuck nodded. "On our right is the control room. The engineer and the announcer sit in there, and, as you can see, they are separated from the broadcasting room by a big glass panel. We can't go into either room right now because somebody's on the air. The red light in the panel tells us that. But we can peek through the glass partitions and watch what's going on."

Ginny's feet had been cold before but now they were icy. A man and a woman were seated, facing each other, at the long table in the broadcasting room. They seemed at ease as they spoke into their mikes, but she could tell from the motions of their heads and hands that they were speaking with animation and enthusiasm. She turned to watch the engineer as Chuck explained the various controls on the monitor board.

"That needle on the gauge," he said, "controls the volume of your voices. But the engineer can't keep you or anybody else from blowing the station right off the air if you bellow into the mike. I mean that, literally, so don't get so excited that you shout at the top of your lungs. People who do that are only slightly more difficult than those who speak out of the side of the mike."

"I can understand why," Whiz, the electrical wizard, put

in. "The sensitive part of the mechanism is in the center of the microphone."

"Right," said Chuck. "If you speak off-center your voice will sound as hollow as though you were in a cave. That's how the sepulchral voices you hear on mystery shows are created. If you forget that the sides of the mike are dead, you'll sound as though you were dead, and speaking from the grave."

Lucy shuddered. "I'm so scared already that I'm a ghost of my former self. I'm sure that the only sound which will come out of my parched throat will be a cough or a sneeze or a hiccup, and I'll do all three right in the center of the mike."

Chuck patted her arm paternally. "I'm glad you brought that up, Lucy. If you or anybody else has to cough or sneeze, go right ahead, for heaven's sake. If you try not to you'll only get tense and your voice will be choky and gaspy. Now, that needle on the board will show the engineer during the warm-up period whether your voices are too loud, or too soft, or too high-pitched, and so on. But that's his worry, not yours, because he can control the volume. Your only worry is to make sure that the mike is about a foot or eighteen inches from your lips." He turned to Ginny.

"This program is about to end so you have a good opportunity for watching the signals the engineer will give you on Friday. Both you and John will be seated on the far side of the table, facing the control room. If you should get carried away and forget to watch the engineer, John will kick you under the table."

"Wonderful!" John cried, grinning. "Imagine being able to kick a lady and get by with it!"

Chuck held up his hand for silence. "If it's getting on toward the end of the program and you seem to be finishing up too soon, the engineer will let you know that you're going to be under-time by giving you the stretch-it-out signal. He does that with a stretching motion of his hands, as though he were drawing an invisible rubber band between his thumbs and forefingers."

"Like pulling molasses," Lucy said with a nod. "Ginny won't be able to misunderstand that one. The old phrase, slow as molasses, will remind her to speed things up."

"No, no!" Chuck groaned. "Just the opposite. That signal means stretch it out. Ad lib. Ask the most talkative member of the panel a question. Anything to keep the ball rolling, Ginny. The wind-it-up signal is this: Watch! The engineer is giving it to the narrator in the broadcasting

room right now. That whirlpool motion he's making with his hand means that the woman, probably, is off on a monologue. Or a topic may have been launched which will be too long unless the narrator cuts it short. Sometimes a person who talks very slowly has control of the mike at a time like this, and a slow-talker is often a slow-thinker. None of you kids suffer from either disease and neither does Alicia. But you'll have to watch her, Ginny and John. She does go off on tangents. We don't want this program to be a monologue, nor do we want to run overtime. So even though it may seem rude, we must all feel free to interrupt our guest whenever she pulls a 'Mrs. Arnold' on us. As a matter of fact, a certain amount of interrupting makes for spontaneity."

"I wish we were on the air right now," Ginny said. "I'd like to interrupt your monologue, Chuck. The engineer is cutting his throat with his forefinger. What on earth does that mean?"

"Just that," Chuck replied with a grin. "'Cut it short; get into your windup sentence. There's only a second left!' We must have missed the other time signals. Pardon my monologue, Ginny. When there are three minutes left, the engineer holds up three fingers; two minutes, two

fingers; one minute, one finger, and he points it right at you. If your timing was perfect he signals by touching the tip of his nose. Which of course means 'right on the nose,' and that's cause for great congratulations all around. It usually means that the whole program was a success. Those folks in the broadcasting room now obviously didn't make the grade, so let's scram because somebody is sure to get a bawling-out."

They trailed out into the main corridor and he led the way to another room at the far end. "I guess you all noticed the turntable in the control room," he said. "This is the music library, Ginny. Uncle Hu told me to ask you to pick out your theme. There are hundreds of records in here, as you can see. Take your choice."

"Oh, oh," Ginny cried. "I'll leave it up to John. He's a member of a very musical family. His parents practically live at concerts and the opera."

"*America the Beautiful*," John said slowly, "would be a good theme. But since the book is about a teen-age girl, how about *All Those Endearing Young Charms*?"

"Perfect," they all agreed in unison.

"It suits Alicia to a T," Ginny added. "She's so young and so charming. Oh, I wish—" She stopped, but later

when she and John were alone in the living room of her home she said:

"Alicia is dying to make up with Tim O'Leary, John. I know how she feels because I was so miserable during our quarrel. Couldn't we do something about that?"

"No sooner said than done," John replied. "As emcees we're allowed to invite a certain number of guests to the broadcast. Why don't we invite Alicia's agent? Seems fitting, especially since we know we can find his phone number in the Westchester directory."

Ginny gave him a little push toward the den across the hall. "You do it, John. Speaking as one man to another, I know you can make him understand and accept."

John came back, chuckling. "It was all I could do to keep him from driving right down here. That I couldn't allow because I'm afraid they'd be on their honeymoon on Friday. Seems they already have their marriage license."

"Maybe," Ginny said softly, "there'll be a double wedding on Saturday. Mrs. Arnold would love it. She's crazy about Alicia, and vice versa."

"They're twin souls," John agreed, "although separated by two generations. Twin souls and a double wedding—wow!"



21 • "THANKS FIVE HUNDRED!"

Thanksgiving Day turned out to be cold and clear. Chuck had strongly advised the Hustlers not to go to the football game. "Win or lose," he said, "you'd all cheer yourselves hoarse. How about listening to it on the radio at my house?"

So after big turkey dinners they met at the Adrian home. It was an exciting game; Harristown won by the narrow margin of one touchdown in the last few seconds of play, but Chuck forced them to demonstrate their enthusiasm non-vocally. When it was over, Ginny's hands were bruised from pounding on the floor. The boys, who had not been able to remain seated throughout the last quarter, collapsed on the hearth rug.

"I hope I make the team next year," said Chuck. "I was a dope not to have made a try for it this fall. The coach asked me to three times, but—well, you all know what was

wrong with me until I met you kids."

"We would have made three touchdowns if you'd been on the team," Lucy said, handing him a toasted marshmallow.

"Burn one of those for me," Whiz said. "How I can be hungry again so soon after consuming half of Granny's turkey is beyond me, but I am."

John glared at him. "It's beyond me, too. And if Babs so much as nibbles at a mashmallow, I'll—" He made the cut-it-short signal, passing his forefinger across Babs's throat. "You're a pain in the neck at best, so don't get a pain in the tummy until after tomorrow evening at eight-thirty. On the nose!"

They all touched their noses solemnly.

"I'm not going to breathe, let alone eat until that moment," said Babs, reaching for the popcorn tray. "We'll have fish for dinner that night and it would be just like me to choke on a bone. In fact, I hope I do. It would be far more painless than dying slowly of stage fright."

"Let's all get cured of that right now," said Chuck. "Why don't we have an informal warm-up here in front of the fire?"

And so they did, without benefit of notes, and it went

off so well that when Ginny tumbled tiredly into bed that night she felt sure that the broadcast would be a success. She would have fallen asleep immediately if it hadn't been for that five hundred dollars which had arrived at the Stall so mysteriously. She hadn't mentioned it to a soul. If Chuck was the culprit—the reformed culprit—everything would be ruined. The twins were loud in their praise of him now, but if they even suspected that he had played such a mean trick on them, they would never forgive him. Teamwork was as important on a radio program as it was in a football game. Saturday morning would be soon enough to tell the other Hustlers about that soiled old envelope.

Friday turned out to be another beautiful day. But Ginny woke up worrying about the money. Suppose somebody had broken into the Stall and stolen it? It didn't really belong to the Hustlers anyway. It belonged to Mrs. Arnold.

By noon the sun, high in the sky, had melted all of the snow. Ginny knew that she just couldn't go on the air that evening with five hundred mysterious dollars hanging heavy, heavy over her head. So she biked to the Stall to make sure the money was still safe. It was. And then she made up her mind. Instead of depositing it in the bank, she would turn it over to Mrs. Arnold. They hadn't been able

to produce the missing Lewis Carroll book for her, but those five, crisp one hundred dollar bills amounted to the same thing.

But, on the other hand, Mrs. Arnold would never, never accept the money without a long explanation of how Ginny had got hold of it. She might well refuse to accept the money at all, since she had made it clear from the very beginning that she considered the book priceless. Ginny was struggling with this dilemma when Carson suddenly came into the Stall.

"Listen, Ginny," he began, holding his cap by the vizor, "I hate to bother you now. You're going on the air this evening to become a state-wide celebrity. You should be all relaxed and everything today, but I can't help it. Betty is about to sell our furniture to raise five hundred dollars so we can pay Mrs. Arnold. I'll say this for the little old dame, she doesn't want the money. Told me herself yesterday that she's already had her money's worth of fun solving the mystery along with Lucy and Babs." He shook his cap at her. "But they haven't solved the mystery. The book is still missing. And you know Betty. Two weeks have elapsed, she keeps saying. So what can I do, Ginny. *What can I do?*"

Ginny smiled, feeling as though a huge black cloud of

responsibility had been lifted from her shoulders. "You and Betty have nothing to worry about, Carson," she said and handed him that old, soiled envelope. "The person who walked out of here with Mrs. Arnold's book has paid us for it. There are five one-hundred-dollar bills in that envelope. Give them to Betty and let her give them to Mrs. Arnold, and that," she finished, dusting her fingers together, "will be the end of it!"

Carson tucked the envelope into the pocket of his uniform. "I always said you were the only one who could solve this mystery, Ginny. Thanks a million. Or should I say, thanks five hundred?"

After Carson left, Ginny determinedly dismissed the whole "R and R" mystery from her mind. She busied herself by typing out the notes which she and John had made the day before. Her opening speech, when she would introduce Alicia—Myra Swenson—was important. John would pick it up from there and introduce the panel. They had decided to introduce Chuck last so that he could carry the ball by immediately asking Alicia a provocative question.

And then, almost before she knew it, it was suppertime, and after that Ginny was dressing with her mother's help.

"Your little blue wool suit will be just right," Mrs.

Gordon kept saying. "The crimson rosebuds John sent will look lovely on one shoulder, dear. No hat. Your hair is so pretty just the way it is."

Ginny kept protesting that nobody was going to see her so it would be all right if she appeared in a T-shirt and jeans, but Mrs. Gordon was firm. "If you're a success, and of course you will be, a lot of people will want to congratulate you after the broadcast. Wear your new flat-heeled shell-pumps. And just for fun, and also in case some pictures are snapped while you're leaving, why don't you wear my mink jacket?" She produced this highly prized garment and placidly placed it around Ginny's shoulders. "There! You look simply stunning."

Ginny, indeed, felt so stunned that she could only give her mother a hug and murmur thanks before she dashed downstairs to where John was waiting . . . John *and* Dad! Ginny flew into her father's arms and laid her hot cheek against his for a moment. "Pray for me, Dad." Then she tucked her hand through the crook of John's arm and went out to Mr. Adrian's car where Alicia and Chuck were waiting for her.

Things happened so fast after that, that the events would always be a blur in Ginny's mind. Alicia, in the front seat

with Mr. Adrian, chatted vivaciously all the way to Broadcast House. She kept right on chatting as the Hustlers and Chuck grouped themselves around the table in the broadcasting room. She looked perfectly beautiful in a thin white wool suit that, Ginny thought, could have passed as an informal wedding gown. Nobody had a chance to develop stage fright during the warm-up period because Alicia and Whiz kept them in a constant state of laughter.

Then all of a sudden the letters in the on-the-air panel turned red and the engineer was pointing his finger at her. Speaking slowly and distinctly, Ginny went into her spiel, but when John took over she relaxed completely. Then Chuck was saying:

"I like your novel a lot, Miss Swenson, but do you yourself believe in it?"

Alicia's lovely voice tinkled with laughter. "Not any more. Living in Harristown has changed me completely."

They were off! Ginny glanced around the long table. Everyone, even Lucy, was completely relaxed. Babs was waiting impatiently to ask a question. She opened her mouth but Whiz broke in with such a funny comment that they all howled with laughter.

Ginny's eyes wandered to the control room. Everyone in

there was laughing, too—Mr. Shoemaker more heartily than the others. Knowing that there might be a lull when the laughter subsided, Ginny asked quickly:

“Did you have a question, Babs?”

Then she glanced up at the clock. Only five minutes to go! Where had the time gone? Now the engineer was holding up three fingers . . . two fingers . . . one finger. . . . Alicia was talking animatedly into the mike:

“—and so, you see, if I hadn’t come to Harristown—”

Ginny snatched the conversational ball away from her. “We’re so glad you did come to visit us, Miss Swenson, and we can’t thank you enough for being our guest tonight. I’m sure that all our listening audience will want to read your fascinating book, *My Heart’s in the City*.”

The engineer was “cutting his throat.” John said, “We all want to thank Miss Swenson, Ginny. Don’t we, boys and girls?”

“Yes,” they chorused enthusiastically.

“Good night, everybody,” said Ginny, just as the engineer touched the tip of his nose.

Before Ginny had a chance to heave a sigh of relief the doors to the broadcasting room burst open and they were engulfed by the guests. Everyone was talking at once; there



were hugs and kisses from proud parents and congratulations all around.

"You're a natural," Mr. Adrian and the engineer shouted into Ginny's ears.

"I'll say she is," Mr. Shoemaker roared, pumping both Ginny's and John's hands. "I'm sold on the whole program. It's terrific. Super terrific!"

Tactfully, Mr. Adrian shepherded them out as quickly as was possible so that the room would be ready for the next program, which followed the newscast. Downstairs in his office, Alicia became the center of attention while the flash bulbs popped. Ginny began to wonder what could have happened to Tim O'Leary. Alicia looked as beautiful as a bride as she buried her flushed face in the bouquet of tea roses which had been gallantly presented to her by Mr. Shoemaker. If only Tim O'Leary could see her now! Why hadn't he come to the broadcast?

Chuck grabbed Ginny's arm. "Uncle Hu wants to talk business in the adjoining room. Can you come down out of the clouds long enough to make sense?" He grinned. "Boy! You were simply out of this world, kid."

Ginny tilted back her head to grin up at him. "And that's just where I'm going to stay—out of the *radio* world.

You take over, please, Chuck. You provided us with a guest, a panel, and taught us the ropes. It would have been a flop without you."

"Don't be silly," he said quickly. "I did everything to make it a flop, but in spite of me you made a success of the program. You must carry on."

"But I don't want to," Ginny said firmly. "Honestly and truly, Chuck, I don't. Ask the other Hustlers and they'll tell you the sad truth about me: I like to *launch* projects, but once they are running smoothly I begin to lose interest. So, please, *you* carry on, Chuck."

He squeezed her arm. "Do you really mean it? Can I tell Uncle Hu that I'm your deputy emcee?"

Ginny shook her chestnut curls. "*The* emcee. The one and only emcee. It's yours, Chuck, all yours."

He melted into the group that soon disappeared behind the closed door of the smaller office. Lucy and the twins departed with their respective parents. Ginny's and John's parents had already gone, as had been prearranged, for they were to be co-hosts at a small supper party in the Inn's private dining room.

Now there was nobody in the big office except Ginny, John, and Alicia. She thrust her bouquet at Ginny. "These

really belong to you, darling. You were the star—”

At that very moment a redheaded man burst in from the lobby. “Flat tire,” he bellowed. “At a moment like this, wouldn’t you know? A flat tire.” He swept Alicia into his arms, flowers and all. “But I heard you via the radio in my car, don’t worry. You were simply wonderful, you pretty little moron. Thank goodness you’ve grown up and are making sense at last!”

John and Ginny tiptoed past them, but for all that very-much-in-love couple would have known, they could have stamped out in seven league boots.

And so there *was* a double wedding on Saturday at the Arnold mansion. Lila and Joe and Tim and ‘Lish! Indian summer came back fleetingly for that particular afternoon and the French doors of the huge parlor were thrown wide open for the reception which followed the ceremony. Everybody in Harristown was there, wandering in and out of the house with gay informality. At five o’clock the brides and grooms drove away under a rice snowstorm, and when the last guest had followed them, Ginny collapsed on the parlor sofa beside Mrs. Arnold.

“It’s all been too, too wonderful,” she breathed. “But I’m utterly exhausted. You don’t look tired at all, Mrs.

Arnold. How do you manage to do it?"

The little old lady peered at Ginny through her lorgnette. "My body never tires," she said tartly, "because my mind is so alert. If you don't watch out, Ginny Gordon, you'll be an old woman before you emerge from your teens. The very idea of your refusing to solve that simple mystery! Why, without moving from this house, I had no trouble at all." She patted Ginny's hand. "Perhaps I had better admit that your list helped."

"But I never made out any list of suspects," Ginny replied. "I simply *told* John that among all the people who came to the opening day of the secondhand-book sale there were only a few who could possibly have been interested in your Lewis Carroll book. They were—"

"Never mind," Mrs. Arnold interrupted. "Call it John's list, if you like, although all he did was write down the names you suggested. Dr. Forrester's name appeared first on the list, and when Lucy and Babs brought me a copy of it, I knew at once what had happened." She pointed with her cane to the black marble mantelpiece. "Are you blind, Ginny?"

Now, at long last, Ginny knew what was different about that army of knickknacks. There were *two* nodding

Chinese mandarins instead of one. For a long time Mrs. Arnold had craved a twin, but the hermit who possessed it had flatly refused to sell his matching mandarin at any price. The very fact that Mrs. Arnold now owned the pair meant that he had been forced to sell his ancient little Chinese gentleman. For five hundred dollars, of course! And so, logically, it must have been the hermit who placed those bills in the soiled envelope and tucked it inside the middle drawer of the desk at the Stall with the note in spidery handwriting: "This is what I owe you."

Ginny gasped. "The hermit is the absent-minded professor to end all absent-minded professors! He fell in love at first sight with *Rhyme? and Reason?* at the sale, and wandered out with it!"

"Exactly," said Mrs. Arnold smugly. "The moment I saw his name at the top of your list, I knew exactly what had happened. So I sent Carson with an invitation to Dr. Forrester to have tea with me at his earliest convenience. He came at once—as I knew he would—to gloat. Obviously, Ginny, he is that person whom my dear husband sought—the owner of the missing *Alices*. To make a long story short, he arrived with all three of the matching volumes, anticipating that I would turn green with envy at the sight of them."

With hooded eyelids she stared off into space and Ginny thought for a moment that the frail old woman had fallen asleep.

Ginny smoothed the skirt of her pretty blue silk frock thinking: "Babs and Lucy and Carson, too, probably, did some sleuthing beforehand in the hermit's cottage to make sure that he *did* have the missing *Alices* . . . once they made sure that Mr. Camden did *not* have them." But there was no sense now in reminding Mrs. Arnold that she had received a lot of help while solving the mystery. The old lady was having such a good time!

As though she had been reading Ginny's mind, Mrs. Arnold opened her eyes wide. "Did I turn green with envy? How can you ask such silly questions, Ginny? If I had searched the world over I could never have found a person who was more deserving of possessing the complete Lewis Carroll set. However, I felt it my duty, as the patroness of your Stall, to ask him bluntly how and where he had obtained *Rhyme? and Reason?* This question, quite naturally, left him covered with confusion. He mumbled through his beard at me and finally admitted that he had, unwittingly, stolen it. I then suggested that, since the market value of the book was five hundred dollars, he had

best reimburse the persons whom he had swindled."

"But he didn't mean to do that," Ginny protested. "Dr. Forrester wouldn't knowingly swindle anybody."

Mrs. Arnold chuckled. "Ah, but you must never forget, Ginny, that in the antique business, it takes a thief to catch a thief. The long and short of it was that dear Dr. Forrester admitted frankly to me that he didn't have five hundred dollars. I then quietly pointed out to him that his twin to my Chinese mandarin was worth exactly that much to me. He shuddered visibly, but on the following afternoon it was a *fait accompli*. I was waiting for the professor with that cloisonné vase which I never really liked, inside of which I had tucked five crisp one-hundred-dollar bills. Dr. Forrester accepted the gift graciously, placed his mandarin on the mantel, and bowed himself out."

Ginny giggled. "Weren't you surprised when Carson brought those same one hundred dollar bills back to you yesterday afternoon?"

"Not at all." Mrs. Arnold drew her lovely cashmere shawl around her shoulders. "Knowing you, I was counting on that maneuver. The money belongs to the Stall, of course, Ginny, since—although unwittingly—you handled the sale of the book. Carson, at my direction, deposited that

sum in your bank account this morning.”

Ginny clutched her chestnut curls in dismay. “But, Mrs. Arnold, the money belongs to you. And since we owe you another three hundred dollars—”

Mrs. Arnold rose majestically to her feet. “I do not wish to discuss money matters any longer, Virginia. As I informed you more than two weeks ago, I have withdrawn my patronage of the Stall. Things there are running too smoothly for my satisfaction. At my age one cannot afford to waste one’s intellect on such dully successful enterprises. With that bright Warner boy as your business manager as well as the new emcee of your radio program, you, too, are going to find things dull, Ginny. A word to the wise is sufficient.”

Ginny scrambled to her feet and handed the little old lady her cane. “I need this more than you do, Mrs. Arnold,” she said weakly. “But you’re right about the Stall. If we let Chuck and some of his pals take over, it will give him a chance to meet everybody in town. That will make things easier for him as emcee of the radio program. But what about us Hustlers? It will leave us without a project for the first time since we formed our club!”

Mrs. Arnold snorted. “Hah! I have cooked up a scheme

which will keep you busy until doomsday. But more of that anon." She rapped on the floor with her cane. "Now that you mention it, I *am* tired—exhausted."

Joe's mother appeared then. "Ready for a nap, Mrs. Arnold?" the housekeeper-companion asked, smiling.

"But, Mrs. Arnold," Ginny wailed, "you can't leave me in suspense like that! What *is* your scheme?"

"Let that be a mystery for a while," the old lady retorted smugly. "As you well know, mystery and suspense are the breath of life to me!"

"To me, too," Ginny silently agreed. And as John kept saying, getting involved in mysteries was as simple as breathing to her!

Whitman

*Famous
Classics*

Treasure Island
Tom Sawyer
Huckleberry Finn
Little Women
Black Beauty
Heidi
Robin Hood
Five Little Peppers and How They Grew
Robinson Crusoe
Little Men
Fifty Famous Fairy Stories
Beautiful Joe
Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
Alice in Wonderland
Bible Stories
Eight Cousins
A Connecticut Yankee
in King Arthur's Court

Meet wonderful friends—in the books that
are favorites—year after year

Fiction for Young People

ROY ROGERS

The Enchanted Canyon
The Brasada Bandits
King of the Cowboys

GENE AUTRY

The Golden Stallion
The Ghost Riders

TARZAN

The Forbidden City
The City of Gold

TROY NESBIT'S MYSTERY ADVENTURES

The Indian Mummy Mystery
The Jinx of Payrock Canyon
Sand Dune Pony
The Diamond Cave Mystery

GINNY GORDON

The Mystery of the Old Barn
The Lending Library
The Broadcast Mystery

TRUDY PHILLIPS

New Girl
Headline Year

ZANE GREY

The Spirit of the Border
The Last Trail

WYATT EARP

RED RYDER
The Thunder Trail

RIN TIN TIN'S RINTY

WALT DISNEY

Legends of Davy Crockett
20,000 Leagues Under the Sea

ANNIE OAKLEY

Danger at Diablo

POLLY FRENCH

Of Whitford High
Takes Charge
The Surprising Stranger

TRIXIE BELDEN

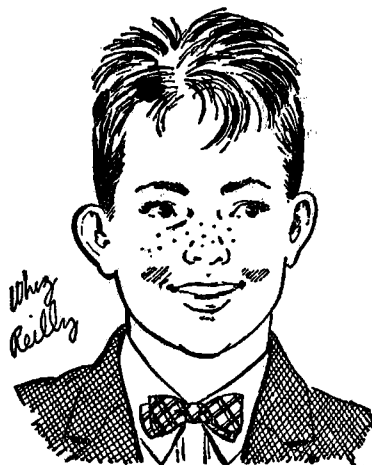
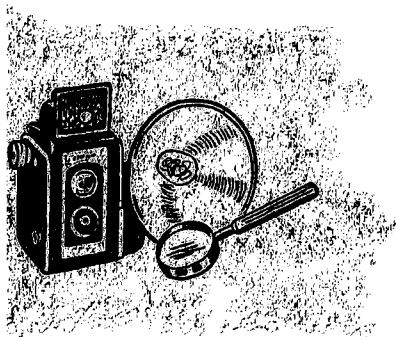
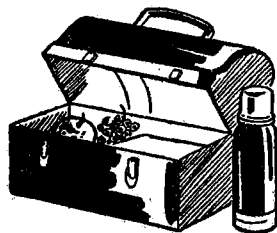
The Red Trailer Mystery
The Gatehouse Mystery
The Mysterious Visitor
The Mystery off Glen Road

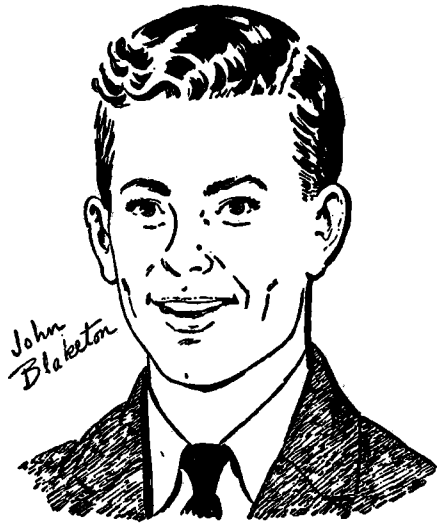
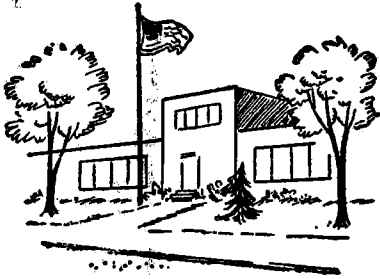
BOBBSEY TWINS

Merry Days Indoors and Out
In the Country
At the Seashore

Whitman

Adventure! Mystery! Read these exciting
stories written especially for young readers





*John
Blackton*



*Jimmy
Gordon*

